

TESTIMONY OF DAVID BECKER

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BEFORE THE CALIFORNIA STATE SENATE

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Good morning, and thank you for inviting me to testify on the important issue of verifying voters' identities. I'm David Becker, the Executive Director and Founder of the nonpartisan, nonprofit, Center for Election Innovation & Research, based in Washington, DC. We work with election officials of both parties, all around the nation, to support elections that voters should and do trust.

The issue of identity verification can often become highly politicized. But I have worked with the professionals who run our elections for over 25 years, and almost all will tell you, regardless of their party, that they want a system where every voter is verifiable, but also where no eligible voter could be disenfranchised. The idea of a single fraudulent ballot, or a single disenfranchised voter, are equally troubling to them. Election officials, law enforcement, and academic studies all confirm that voter fraud, and in particular, voter impersonation fraud, are extremely rare.

And as you know, California and indeed every state already has processes in place to verify the identity of voters, from federally-required ID to register, pursuant to the Help America Vote Act of 2002, to processes to confirm the identity of voters at the polling place or confirm the identity of those returning mail ballots.

That said, several states across the political spectrum have sought to strengthen these provisions, and there are several examples where states have developed systems that meet the dual goals of ensuring integrity, while preserving access for all eligible voters.

Let's start with mail ballot verification, since that's how the majority of Californians cast their ballots. Several states have innovated to make mail ballot verification more accurate and more efficient. Georgia, for instance, requires a drivers license number or state ID number on their returned mail ballots. If the voter has neither, they can give the last four digits of their Social Security Number. In Georgia, having neither in the voter file is extremely rare – 99.94% of all Georgia voters have either a state ID or Social Security number in their voter file.

Minnesota similarly requires a drivers license, state ID, or Social Security number. Virginia requires the last four digits of the Social Security Number, plus the year of birth. Importantly, if a voter fails to include the identification numbers (which happens rarely), or if a match proves difficult, these states all have failsafes, such as a signature match, to allow for the ballot to be counted. These states have generally found that such methods reduce the amount of time it takes to verify mail ballots, while maintaining or enhancing their ability to confirm identity of the voter.

And some counties are experimenting further, with King County, Washington, piloting a “pre-verification” process where voters can go online and submit their ID number and have their identity verified *before* election officials even receive the ballot.

These innovations have been enormously popular, with large bipartisan majorities expressing support. 91.5% of those that used King County’s new “pre-verification” said they’d use it again, for instance.

With regard to in-person voting, the options for secure, non-disenfranchising voter ID, have been tested over decades. The most common, and successful form of voter ID implemented in states have been those that offer an affidavit alternative for eligible voters, in those rare cases where they don’t have, or can’t get, the requisite ID. States as diverse as Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Louisiana, Michigan, South Dakota, and Virginia require some form of ID when a voter casts a ballot in person, but if they don’t have ID at the time they vote, the voter can fill out an affidavit with identifying information and an oath under penalty of perjury, and cast a regular ballot.

This enables states to ensure that no eligible voters are disenfranchised, while also preventing those rare cases of voter impersonation fraud, and providing an evidentiary base to investigate potential cases. The Idaho Secretary of State reported that only 0.2% of all voters in 2024 used an affidavit, and further confirms that “there are no known instances of voters misrepresenting themselves on an affidavit.” Michigan found an similar rate of 0.2% affidavits used in the 2020 election.

You’ll note that this group of states spans the political spectrum. It’s true that there are efforts to implement extremely-restrictive voter ID laws in some states, which could disenfranchise some eligible voters who lack ID. But if California decides to amend its voter identification laws, other states have demonstrated that there are ways to do it without disenfranchising eligible voters, and in the case of mail ballots, perhaps building efficiencies that could result in faster, more accurate counting of ballots.

Thak you, and I’m happy to answer any questions you might have.