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# California State Senate

## ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS



**SCOTT WIENER**  
CHAIR  
**AGENDA**

Tuesday, April 21, 2026  
9:30 a.m. -- State Capitol, Room 113

**Staff Director**  
Carrie Cornwell

**Principal Consultant**  
Scott Matsumoto

**Committee Assistant**  
Rida Shaikh

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### **SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS**

1. SB 884 Umberg Elections in 2026 through 2029.(Urgency)
2. SB 1164 Cervantes Elections.

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### **MEASURES HEARD IN FILE ORDER**

3. SB 900 McNerney Political Reform Act of 1974: top contributors: disclosures.
4. SB 1225 Niello Initiative and referendum measures: title and summary.
5. SCA 3 Niello Elections: initiatives and referenda.
6. SB 1389\*\* Dahle The Political Reform Act of 1974: late filing of reports.
7. SCA 4\* Archuleta Property taxation: veterans' exemption.
8. SB 1360 Cervantes Elections: translation of election materials.
9. SB 1418\* Cervantes Elections officials: meetings.
10. SB 1429\* Elections and Constitutional Amendments Elections.
11. SB 1430\* Elections and Constitutional Amendments Elections.
12. SB 1431\* Elections and Constitutional Amendments Elections.
13. SB 1432\* Elections and Constitutional Amendments Political Reform Act of 1974.

\*Consent

\*\*Consent with Committee Amendments

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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**  
Senator Scott Wiener, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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<b>Bill No:</b>	SB 884	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	4/21/26
<b>Author:</b>	Umberg		
<b>Version:</b>	4/15/26		
<b>Urgency:</b>	Yes	<b>Fiscal:</b>	Yes
<b>Consultant:</b>	Scott Matsumoto		

**Subject:** Elections in 2026 through 2029

**DIGEST**

This bill makes changes to vote by mail (VBM) drop off locations, the deadline for when VBM ballots must be received, and activities allowed within 200 feet of a polling location for elections in 2026, 2027, 2028, and 2029.

**ANALYSIS**

Existing law:

- 1) Requires every active registered voter to receive a VBM ballot for any election.
- 2) Requires election officials to begin mailing VBM ballots no later than 29 days before Election Day.
- 3) Provides a VBM ballot is timely cast if it is received by the voter's elections official by mail no later than seven days after Election Day and is postmarked or time/date stamped on or before Election Day.
- 4) Requires counties using the vote center model, pursuant to the Voter's Choice Act (VCA), to provide at least two VBM ballot drop-off locations or one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 15,000 registered voters, whichever results in more locations. For counties using the polling place or all-mail model, at least two VBM ballot drop-off locations or one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 30,000 registered voters, whichever results in more locations must be provided. All VBM ballot drop-off locations must be open 28 days prior to and through Election Day.
- 5) Requires counties using the polling place or all-mail model, to provide at least two VBM ballot drop-off locations or one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 30,000 registered voters, whichever results in more locations. All VBM ballot drop-off locations needed to be open 28 days prior to and through Election Day.
- 6) Prohibits a person, any time a voter may be casting a ballot, within the 100 feet to the entrance to a building that contains a polling location, an election official's office, a satellite location, or an outdoor site where a voter may cast or drop off a ballot from doing any of the following:

- a) Circulating an initiative, referendum, recall, or nomination petition or any other petition.
  - b) Soliciting a vote or speak to a voter on the subject of marking the voter's ballot.
  - c) Placing a sign relating to voters' qualifications or speaking to a voter on the subject of the voter's qualifications, except as provided in existing law.
  - d) Displaying a candidate's name, likeness, or logo.
  - e) Displaying a ballot measure's number, title, subject, or logo.
  - f) Wearing or using buttons, hats, pencils, pens, shirts, signs, or stickers containing electioneering information.
  - g) Disseminating audible electioneering information.
  - h) Obstructing access to, loitering near, or disseminating visible or audible electioneering information at VBM ballot drop boxes.
- 7) Prohibits a candidate or representative of a candidate, and a proponent, opponent, or representative of a proponent or opponent, of an initiative, referendum, or recall measure, or of a charter amendment, from soliciting the vote of a VBM voter, or from doing any electioneering, while in the residence or in the immediate presence of the voter, and during the time the person knows the VBM voter is voting.
- 8) Provides that any person in violation of 6) or 7) is guilty of a misdemeanor.
- 9) Requires the polls to remain open if voters are in the polling location or are in line at the door, but have not been able to cast their vote. If the time for closing the polls is extended pursuant to a court order, all votes cast during the time that the polling location is extended must be by provisional ballot. Any provisional ballots cast must be separated and held apart from other provisional ballots cast by voters prior to the time the closing of the polls was extended.

This bill:

- 1) Provides, for any regular or special election, beginning with the November 3, 2026, statewide general election and through elections held or proclaimed in 2029, the following:
  - a) At least two VBM ballot drop-off locations within the county or at least one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 11,250 registered voters, whichever results in more VBM ballot drop-off locations. A county with fewer than 11,250 registered voters must provide at least one VBM ballot drop-off location.
  - b) All VBM ballot drop-off locations must be open, at a minimum, during regular business hours beginning not less than 30 days before Election Day and continuing through and including Election Day.

- c) A VBM ballot is timely cast if it is received by the voter's elections official via USPS or a bona fide private mail delivery company no later than 10 days after Election Day if either the ballot is postmarked or timestamped on or before Election Day or, if postmarking information is not available, the ballot is date stamped by the elections official on or before Election Day.
  - d) A prohibition for federal, state, or local law enforcement officers from arresting any person within 200 feet of a polling location on Election Day, except for crimes related to disrupting the operation of the polling location, a violent or serious felony specified in the Penal Code, or larceny.
  - e) An extension of the electioneering prohibition from 100 feet to 200 feet from either the entrance of a building that contains a polling place, an elections official's office, or a satellite location or any outdoor site at which a voter may cast or drop off a ballot.
  - f) A county elections official may extend the time for closing of a polling location if the county elections official determines that voting was disrupted as a result of d) or e). All votes cast during any extension of polling place hours must be by provisional ballots.
- 2) Provides the provisions of this bill remain in effect until January 1, 2030.
- 3) Contains an urgency clause to take effect immediately.

### **BACKGROUND**

Vote by Mail Drop-off Locations. For the November 5, 2024, presidential general election, counties conducted elections using one of three models: vote centers, polling places, or all-mail. Each election model provides a different set of services for voters. For VBM ballots drop-off locations, counties using the vote center model needed to provide at least two VBM ballot drop-off locations or one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 15,000 registered voters, whichever resulted in more locations. For counties using the polling place or all-mail model, at least two VBM ballot drop-off locations or one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 30,000 registered voters, whichever resulted in more locations. All VBM ballot drop-off locations needed to be open 28 days prior to and through Election Day.

According to data from the Secretary of State's office, 29 counties used the vote center model, 25 counties used the polling place model, and four counties used the all-mail model. In total, there were 1,968 VBM ballot drop-off locations throughout California.

This bill would modify the minimum threshold used for determining the number of VBM ballot drop-off locations to at least two VBM ballot drop-off locations within the county or at least one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 11,250 registered voters, whichever results in more VBM ballot drop-off locations. This would result in an increase in the number of VBM ballot drop-off locations throughout the state.

Vote By Mail Statistics. Californians have increasingly relied on VBM ballots to cast a vote. According to the Secretary of State's office, the 1962 general election saw 2.63%

of California voters vote by mail. For the 2024 presidential general election, 80.76% of California voters voted by mail. For the 2025 statewide special election, 88.89% of California voters voted by mail.

Vote By Mail Ballot Rejections. A number of VBM ballots are rejected at every election for various reasons. A rejected ballot is a ballot not counted because of a missing signature, a noncomparing signature, the ballot was missing from the envelope, multiple ballots were returned in one envelope, the ballot was not received on time, the voter already voted, or there is a missing or incorrect address on the envelope. A ballot can also be rejected if a voter did not provide their driver's license number, identification card number, or last four digits of their social security number when registering to vote and did not provide a form of identification when voting for the first time. For the 2024 presidential general election, 33,016 ballots of the 122,480 total number of rejected ballots were rejected because the VBM ballot was not received on time.

Electioneering. The earliest reference to a 100-foot electioneering prohibition dates back to at least 1891 where the Political Code stated, "No officer of election, nor any person, shall do any electioneering on election day within one hundred feet of any polling place." The Political Code (which later became the Elections Code) from 1891 also stated, "No person shall solicit a vote or speak to a voter on the subject of marking his ticket within one hundred feet of the polling place." It should be noted that where the 100-foot prohibition is measured from has changed over time, but the actual number, 100 feet, has remained generally the same with some exceptions.

SB 35 (Umberg and McGuire), Chapter 318, Statutes of 2021, among other provisions, modified the distance prohibiting electioneering and other prescribed political activities to within the 100 feet from the entrance of a building that contains a polling location, an elections official's office, a satellite location, or from an outdoor voting area where a voter may cast their ballot or drop off a ballot. Prior to the bill, the electioneering prohibition zone extended from the voting room instead of the building.

Federal Interference in California's Elections. In 2025, SB 851 (Cervantes), Chapter 238, Statutes of 2025, sought to address potential federal inference in California's elections. Among the provisions of the bill, it expanded the prohibition for a person in possession of a firearm or any uniformed peace officer, private guard, or security personnel or any person who is wearing a uniform of a peace officer, guard, or security personnel, to be stationed in the immediate vicinity of, or posted at, a polling location to include an officer or agent of a federal law enforcement agency, unless certain conditions are met. The author sought to "ensure that federal agents are treated the same way as state and local law enforcement so that it is a crime to hire or arrange for law enforcement to be posted at or near a voting location or county registrar's office without authorization."

## **COMMENTS**

- 1) Author's Statement. California has both the constitutional right and responsibility to run our own safe and secure elections, and the state intends to do exactly that. In the interest of protecting this fundamental right and ensuring voters feel safe participating in our democracy, no law enforcement presence, including state or local, should be permitted near voting areas unless necessary to address an

imminent threat of bodily harm. This bill will protect our voters, defend local control, and uphold our democracy regardless of whether the federal government chooses to respect those principles.

- 2) Election Administration. If chaptered, this bill would take effect immediately. Election officials will have a limited amount of time and resources to purchase new equipment (i.e., VBM ballot drop-off boxes), secure locations for this new equipment as well as securing new early voting sites, and find election workers to collect ballots at these additional VBM ballot drop-off locations. In order to implement many of the provisions of this bill, it will require an extensive amount of time and coordination. Following an election, including after this bill sunsets in 2030, election officials will need to ensure the security and maintenance of fixed VBM ballot drop-off boxes and have the necessary storage space for nonfixed VBM ballot drop-off boxes.
- 3) Postmarks and Delivery. This bill extends the VBM ballot receipt deadline from seven to 10 days after Election Day, if it was postmarked by Election Day. If the author intends for this to address potential postmarking delays with the USPS, extending the deadline to receive VBM ballots will not solve the postmark issue. The central issue is the act of timely postmarking a VBM ballot and not necessarily on the delivery of a VBM ballot to an elections official.
- 4) Crimes within 200 Feet of a Polling Place. This bill prohibits a federal, state, or local law enforcement officer from arresting any person within 200 feet of a polling place on Election Day, except for a crime related to disrupting the operation of the polling place, a violent or serious felony, or larceny. In other words, if a crime occurs near a polling place and does not disrupt with election administration on Election Day nor is one of the specified violent or serious felonies in the Penal Code, the person committing a crime is not arrested. The distance from a polling place is also not linear and is more like a sphere that travels in any direction, such as in the building next to the polling location.

The committee should consider whether this provision should be narrowed, if the actual distance should remain to be 200 feet from a polling place, if it should be only on Election Day, and if it should apply to the entrance of the building of a polling location or an outdoor site similar to electioneering prohibitions. The committee should also consider an approach that covers all, or almost all crimes, instead of specifically listing specific crimes where a person could be arrested within 200 feet of a polling place.

- 5) Electioneering Distance. Under existing law, electioneering cannot occur within 100 feet of a polling location. This bill extends this perimeter to 200 feet. Similar to the previous comment, the 200-foot zone travels in every direction and may make it difficult to enforce in densely-populated areas with a polling location. The committee should consider the necessity of the 200-foot electioneering zone and how prohibited activities within the perimeter would be enforced. The committee could also consider various alternatives, such as making the extension from 100 to 200 feet permissive and at the discretion of the elections official but, if extended, uniform throughout the jurisdiction.

- 6) Argument in Support. In a letter supporting this bill, the California Federation of Labor Unions, AFL-CIO, states, in part, the following:

...growing concerns about possible election interference and voter intimidation in state elections threaten to undermine voter confidence and suppress turnout, particularly in immigrant and minority communities. SB 884 builds on existing protections by expanding the buffer zone around polling places and ballot processing sites to prohibit both electioneering and federal immigration enforcement within 200 feet of those locations... These reforms provide counties with needed flexibility and help to ensure that every eligible vote is counted.

SB 884 is a necessary step to preserve California's commitment to free, fair, and secure elections by ensuring that voters can cast their ballots without fear or intimidation.

- 7) Argument in Opposition. In a letter opposing this bill, the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials notes the increase in the number of VBM ballot drop-off locations "introduces further financial and administrative burdens, particularly in jurisdictions already challenged by staffing shortages, long routes for servicing drop boxes, or limited secure public facilities."

Other provisions in the bill also "raise significant concerns related to safety, clarity, and practical administration" and is as follows:

Expanding the electioneering boundary from 100 to 200 feet invites confusion and potential conflict while leaving unclear which entity would be responsible for enforcement. A 200-foot boundary will, in most cases, extend past the boundary of the property where a vote center is sited; requiring negotiation with surrounding property owners to post signs. The provisions restricting law-enforcement presence near voting locations may unintentionally compromise the ability of law enforcement to respond swiftly and appropriately to safety risks that would interfere with voting. Additionally, placing responsibility on county elections officials to make real-time judgments on extending polling hours during disruptions introduces uncertainty and risk for voters and election workers alike.

- 8) Double Referral. If approved by this committee, this bill will be referred to the Committee on Judiciary for further consideration.

### **RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

AB 5 (Berman), Chapter 250, Statutes of 2025, required county election officials to report vote totals for all ballots, except specified types of ballots that require special processing, by the 13th day after the election. These exceptions included ballots needing to be duplicated, VBM ballots forwarded from a county to county of origin, VBM ballots with an issue with the voter's signature, provisional ballots, ballots cast by a person who votes through conditional voter registration, and ballots received by an elections official after the fourth day following Election Day. The elections official may also file a notice of extension with the Secretary of State and include the reason for the extension.

SB 851 (Cervantes), Chapter 238, Statutes of 2025, among other provisions, expanded the prohibition for a person in possession of a firearm or any uniformed peace officer, private guard, or security personnel or any person who is wearing a uniform of a peace officer, guard, or security personnel, to be stationed in the immediate vicinity of, or posted at, a polling location to include an officer or agent of a federal law enforcement agency, unless certain conditions are met.

SB 35 (Umberg and McGuire), Chapter 318, Statutes of 2021, among other provisions, modified the distance prohibiting electioneering and other prescribed political activities to within the 100 feet from the entrance of a building that contains a polling location, an elections official's office, a satellite location, or from an outdoor voting area where a voter may cast their ballot or drop off a ballot.

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** Author

**Support:** Fiona Ma, CPA, California State Treasurer  
California Federation of Labor Unions, AFL-CIO  
California School Employees Association, AFL-CIO  
Disability Rights California  
Latino Community Foundation  
UnidosUS  
1 individual

**Oppose:** California Association of Clerks and Election Officials  
9 individuals

**-- END --**



- b) An impairment of the equal opportunity or ability of protected class members to participate in any stage of the political process based on the totality of circumstances.
  - c) An eligible voter facing an undue burden to their opportunity or ability to participate in any stage of the political process as a result of their incarceration or prior criminal conviction.
  - d) Direct or circumstantial evidence of intentional discrimination.
- 3) Provides a violation of 1) of this bill does not exist if the political subdivision or state agency demonstrates both of the following with clear and convincing evidence:
- a) The election policy or practice is necessary to significantly further a compelling and particularized governmental interest.
  - b) No reasonable alternative election policy or practice exists that comparably furthers the compelling and particularized governmental interest and results in a smaller disparity between protected class members and other members of the electorate.
- 4) Prohibits a political subdivision from employing any method of election that has the effect, will likely have the effect, or is motivated in part by the intent to dilute the vote of protected class members.
- 5) Provides a violation of 4) is established if direct or circumstantial evidence of intentional discrimination exists or both of the following are satisfied:
- a) Either of the following conditions exist:
    - i) Elections in the political subdivision exhibit racially polarized voting resulting in an impairment of the equal opportunity or ability of protected class members to nominate or elect candidates of their choice.
    - ii) Based on the totality of circumstances, the equal opportunity or ability of protected class members to nominate or elect candidates of their choice is impaired.
  - b) Another method of election or a change to the existing method of election exists that could be constitutionally adopted or ordered to mitigate the impairment.
- 6) Provides a specified list of guidelines and rules for evaluating voter suppression claims in 1) of this bill and vote dilution claims in 4).
- 7) Provides that to the extent courts are afforded discretion on any issue, including, but not limited to, questions concerning discovery, procedure, admissibility of evidence, or remedies, it is the policy of the state that courts must exercise that discretion, and weigh other equitable discretion, in favor of the following factors:

- a) Making voting, the fundamental right to vote, and the ability to participate in the democratic process more accessible to eligible voters.
  - b) Safeguarding and vindicating, to the fullest extent possible, the voting rights of all voters, including, but not limited to, equitable access to opportunities to register to vote and vote, and the equal opportunity to elect candidates of choice.
  - c) Ensuring protected class members have full access to relief from discrimination in voting.
- 8) Provides that an action to cure a violation may be brought by any individual, an entity, or by the Attorney General. Notice requirements, including notices alleging a violation of the CVRA, court procedures, court proceedings, and remedies are also prescribed.
- 9) Requires any political subdivision to obtain preapproval from the Attorney General before enacting or administering any specified covered practice, if the political subdivision has entered into a court-approved settlement relating to this bill, a violation of specified federal laws, any other state law or constitutional provision concerning the right to vote for protected class members within the previous 10 years. A covered practice includes any of the following:
- a) A new or modified method of election, including changes to districting plans or maintenance of a method of election following a decennial census.
  - b) An annexation or deannexation.
  - c) A reduction in language assistance.
- 10) Requires the Attorney General to create a process and a timeline for political subdivisions subject to preapproval in order to implement the preapproval procedures in 9).

### **BACKGROUND**

California Voting Rights Act of 2001. SB 976 (Polanco), Chapter 129, Statutes of 2002, enacted the CVRA to address racial block voting in at-large elections for local office in California. In areas where racial block voting occurs, an at-large method of election can dilute the voting rights of minority communities if the majority typically votes to support candidates that differ from the candidates who are preferred by minority communities.

In such situations, dividing a jurisdiction up into districts can result in districts in which a minority community can elect the candidate of its choice or otherwise have the ability to influence the outcome of an election. Accordingly, the CVRA prohibits an at-large method of election from being imposed or applied in a political subdivision in a manner that impairs the ability of a protected class of voters to elect the candidate of its choice or to influence the outcome of an election, as a result of the dilution or the abridgement of the rights of voters who are members of the protected class.

Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965. The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides, in part, that “[t]he right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous conditions of servitude.” Additionally, the 15th Amendment authorizes Congress to enact legislation to enforce its provisions. The 15th Amendment was ratified in February 1870.

In 1965, Congress determined that state officials were failing to comply with the provisions of the 15th Amendment. As a result, Congress passed and President Johnson signed the VRA. The VRA, among other provisions, prohibits any “voting qualification or prerequisite to voting or standard, practice, or procedure” from being imposed by any “[s]tate or political subdivision in a manner which results in a denial or abridgement of the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.”

Section 2 of the VRA is a nationwide prohibition against voting practices and procedures, including redistricting plans and at-large election systems, poll worker hiring, and voting registration procedures, that discriminate on the basis of race, color, or membership in a language minority group. The U.S. Supreme Court is currently considering the protections available under Section 2 as it relates to racial vote dilution in *Louisiana v. Callais*.

Section 2 allowed the U.S. Attorney General or affected private citizens to bring lawsuits in federal court to challenge practices that may violate the VRA. In 2021, in *Brnovich v. DNC*, the U.S. Supreme Court made it more difficult to bring voter suppression claims through the judicial process.

Section 4 of the VRA set the criteria for determining whether a jurisdiction is covered under certain provisions of the VRA, including the requirement for review of changes affecting voting under Section 5.

Section 5 of the VRA requires certain states and covered jurisdictions to receive approval for any changes to law and practices affecting voting from the U.S. Department of Justice or the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia to ensure that the changes do not have the purpose or effect of “denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race or color.” This is also known as a “preclearance” requirement.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Shelby County v. Holder* in 2013, held that a coverage formula in Section 4 of the VRA is unconstitutional and can no longer be used as a basis for subjecting jurisdictions to preclearance under Section 5 of the VRA. The Court did not directly strike down Section 5, which contains the preclearance requirements, but without Section 4, no jurisdiction will be subject to Section 5 preclearance unless Congress enacts a new coverage formula.

### **COMMENTS**

- 1) Author’s Statement. Under the stewardship of Chief Justice John Roberts, the U.S. Supreme Court has gradually chipped away at the federal VRA and is poised to overturn what is left of the VRA through its pending decision in *Louisiana v. Callais*. Because the CVRA only prohibits discriminatory at-large election systems, if the

U.S. Supreme Court acts, California law would be inadequate to provide voting rights safeguards currently in the federal VRA that have protected Californian voters for generations. This bill will enshrine many of the provisions prohibiting vote dilution, voter suppression, and voter discrimination in the federal VRA into state law. This bill will also ensure that California continues to lead on voting rights by providing the California Attorney General and individual California voters with improved means to enforce state elections laws.

- 2) Notice Letters. Under existing law, before commencing with an action to enforce the CVRA, a prospective plaintiff must mail a written notice to the clerk of the political subdivision asserting that the political subdivision's method of conducting elections may violate the CVRA. This bill requires the party sending a notice letter to a political subdivision asserting a violation of the CVRA occurred *and* the type of remedy the party believes would address the violation. Even though this bill requires a remedy to be noted in the letter, the differences in actual content between letters submitted pursuant to existing law and letters that would be submitted pursuant to this bill are not completely clear. In particular, the amount of detail and justification needed for letters submitted under this bill.
- 3) Double Referral. If approved by this committee, this bill will be referred to the Committee on Judiciary for further consideration.

### **RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

SB 976 (Polanco), Chapter 129, Statutes of 2002, enacted the CVRA to address racial block voting in at-large elections for local office in California.

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** The California Democracy Partnership  
 AAPIs for Civic Empowerment  
 ACLU California Action  
 Asian Law Caucus  
 California Common Cause  
 California Environmental Voters  
 Catalyst California  
 Inland Empire United  
 League of Women Voters of California  
 Legal Defense Fund  
 Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)  
 Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans  
 SEIU California  
 UCLA Voting Rights Project

**Support:** Black Leadership Council  
 California Domestic Workers Coalition  
 Campaign Legal Center  
 Courage California  
 Dēmos

Dolores Huerta Foundation  
FairVote Action  
Hmong Innovating Politics  
NextGen California  
Starting Over Inc.  
Starting Over Strong  
VietRISE  
Western Center on Law and Poverty

**Oppose:** None received

**-- END --**

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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**  
Senator Scott Wiener, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 900 **Hearing Date:** 4/21/26  
**Author:** McNerney  
**Version:** 3/23/26  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Carrie Cornwell

**Subject:** Political Reform Act of 1974: top contributors: disclosures

**DIGEST**

This bill changes the disclosures required in campaign advertisements to make them shorter and take up less space, including for those on billboards.

**ANALYSIS**

Existing law:

- 1) Includes the Political Reform Act (PRA), which establishes California's campaign finance and disclosure laws for state and local campaigns, candidates, officeholders, and ballot measures, and which created the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) to implement, administer, and enforce the PRA.
- 2) Defines "advertisement," for the purposes of the PRA, as any general or public communication that is authorized and paid for by a campaign committee to support or oppose at least one candidate for elective office or at least one ballot measure.
- 3) Requires advertisements that support or oppose candidates or ballot measures to include disclosure statements that comply with certain formatting, display, legibility, and audibility requirements.
- 4) Requires, in most cases, these disclosure statements to disclose the committee paying for the advertisement, the top three contributors to the committee paying for the advertisement, the use of artificial intelligence in its making, and in the case of independent expenditures, a notation that reads, "This advertisement was not authorized or paid for by a candidate for this office or a committee controlled by a candidate for this office."
- 5) Requires, in the case of a printed advertisement that is larger than those designed to be individually distributed and including yard signs and billboards, that the disclosures be in Arial equivalent type font with each line taking up a total height of at least 5 percent of the height of the advertisement, and printed on a solid background with sufficient contrast that is easily readable by the average viewer.
- 6) Excludes from the definition of advertisement, items such as skywriting, apparel, and small items, on which it would very difficult to include the required disclosures.

This bill:

- 1) Allows the shortening of names of top contributors in required disclosure statements in advertisements by, among other things:
  - a) Leaving out from the beginning of the name “The,” “A,” or “An.”
  - b) Leaving out from the end of the name “and affiliated entities,” “and its subsidiaries,” “state council,” “of America,” “of California,” and enumerated other similar terms.
  - c) Replacing the name of the candidate-controlled committee with the name of the candidate and office, if the candidate is a current officeholder, followed by the word “Committee.”
  - d) Authorizing numerous common abbreviations, including “&” for “and,” “Fed.” for “Federation,” and state abbreviations (e.g., CA for California).
  - e) Authorizing the FPPC to approve additional abbreviations that are widely recognized and unambiguous in meaning.
- 2) Mandates, among many formatting changes, that disclosures in print advertisements, including billboards, appear as applicable in the following order:
  - a) The notice the advertisement was created using artificial intelligence. This notice shall be separated from other disclosures by half a blank line;
  - b) The advertisement was not paid for by the candidate;
  - c) Who paid for the advertisement; and
  - d) Top contributors, which shall be listed in bold, displayed with the phrase, “Ad Committee’s Top Funders,” which shall be underlined.
- 3) Requires disclosures on billboards and other printed advertisements that are larger than those designed to be individually distributed to:
  - a) List the names of top contributors separated by bullet points or numbering, instead of commas, and appear on one horizontal line, if possible.
  - b) Have each line of the disclosure take up at least the lesser of 5 percent of the width or the height of the billboard or other printed material.
- 4) Shortens the disclosure on an advertisement paid for by an independent expenditure to read, “Not paid for by candidate” or “Not paid for by a candidate for this office,” as applicable.
- 5) Requires that mass mailings list the top five contributors, rather than the top three contributors as required for other campaign advertisements.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Disclose Act and Other Previous Legislation. AB 249 (Mullin), Chapter 546, Statutes of 2017, which is commonly known as the “Disclose Act,” significantly changed the content and format of disclosure statements required on campaign advertisements, in order to make the disclosures more prominent. AB 249 also established new requirements to determine which contributors must be listed on campaign advertisements by defining “top contributors” as the persons from whom the committee paying for an advertisement has received its three highest cumulative contributions of \$50,000 or more.

Since AB 249 was enacted, several other bills have modified the content and format of the required disclosure statements. Notably, AB 2188 (Mullin), Chapter 754, Statutes of 2018, required online platforms that sell political ads to make specified information about those political ads available to the public and made various changes to the format for disclosures required on electronic media ads. AB 201 (Cervantes), Chapter 555, Statutes of 2019, required a text message that supports or opposes a candidate or ballot measure to disclose the name of the candidate or committee that paid for the text message and, in certain circumstances, the top contributors to the committee.

The Disclose Act’s approach was also extended to apply to initiative, referendum, and recall petitions with the passage of SB 47 (Allen), Chapter 563, Statutes of 2019. Among other things, SB 47 required that an official top funders disclosure be made either on the petition itself or on a separate sheet that identifies the name of the committee and any qualifying top contributors.

Most recently, SB 1360 (Umberg), Chapter 887, Statutes of 2022, changed the text and formatting of required disclosures on petitions, electronic media, and video campaign advertisements. It also required the disclosure of top contributors funding the advertisements on electronic media advertisements.

## **COMMENTS**

- 1) Author’s Statement. California has taken several steps to increase transparency around who is paying for political ads through mail, television, radio, social media posts, text messages, and petitions. These disclosure laws increase visibility into outside groups and lead to a more transparent political advertising framework in the state, but there are gaps in California’s disclosure laws. Existing rules have allowed outside groups to use confusing and wordy committee names that make disclosure messages cumbersome to read, especially on billboards and large print advertisements. These requirements have taken the focus away from the top funders to committees and have steered attention toward the committees themselves. California can better daylight who is paying for political advertisements by making disclosure messages easier to read and identifying more donors to these groups.
- 2) How Much is Too Much? The Disclose Act provides very specific and detailed rules governing what disclosures must be made in political advertisements and how those disclosures must appear, including what must be disclosed, in what order, using specific words in a specific font and with detailed formatting rules. This bill adds to

that detail, leading to an ever more complicated landscape for disclosure rules in campaign advertisements. At some point, this level of complication makes the rules hard to understand, comply with, and enforce. This bill is an incremental step in this process.

- 3) Arguments in Support. The California State Outdoor Advertising Association, a co-sponsor of the bill, writes in support:

This bill provides a necessary and balanced solution to ensure both transparency and readability in political advertisements while preserving the effectiveness of billboard messaging.

California's existing laws require political advertisements to disclose their sponsors to promote transparency and inform voters. However, in the case of yard signs or billboards (particularly for committees supporting or opposing a candidate or proposition), the regulations have inadvertently resulted in disclosures that can consume up to 50% of the total space on the sign. For a committee, the top three contributors must be listed, each taking up a minimum of 5% of the sign's height/space, which can crowd out the messaging of the advertisement itself. This can make advertisements difficult to read and reduce the viability of billboards as a means of political communication. The disproportionate size of the disclosure text undermines the intent of the law by impairing legibility.

- 4) CARS. In 2000, the Secretary of State deployed, pursuant to SB 49 (Karnette), Chapter 866, Statutes of 1997, a system called the California Automated Lobby Activity and Campaign Contribution and Expenditure Search System, or Cal-Access. Cal-Access replaced the paper-based system and provides online filing of reports and statements required by the PRA. It also provides online access to these statements and reports for the public.

Cal-Access is now 27 years old, and the SOS reports that components of the system are no longer supported by its vendor. As a result, the system has periodically crashed and denied public access. Additionally, the SOS has indicated that the ability to make modifications to Cal-Access is very limited.

Due to its age and associated shortcomings, SB 1349 (Hertzberg), Chapter 845, Statutes of 2016, directed the SOS, in consultation with the FPPC, to replace Cal-Access with a new disclosure system, the Cal-Access Replacement System or CARS. The SOS expects to fully deploy CARS later this year.

Legislation in recent years, including AB 808 (Addis), Chapter 278, Statutes of 2025, has updated language throughout the PRA to conform it with filings being made via CARS when it begins to operate. These statutes will take effect when the SOS certifies that CARS is operational. Because of this, this bill amends one code section twice, once as it appears today and once as it will appear when the SOS certifies CARS.

- 5) Technical amendments. As noted, due to duplicative code sections reflecting current law and the law after CARS is implemented, this bill needs a technical

amendment to modify Government Code Section 84504.2, as it was amended by Section 4 of AB 2355 (Wendy Carrillo), Chapter 260, Statutes of 2024, to make all the changes this bill contains, as well as preserve the future operative language of this code section. This will cause the bill to amend another code section twice.

**RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

AB 950 (Solache) of 2025 was nearly identical to this bill. AB 950 was held on the suspense file in Senate Committee on Appropriations.

**POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** California State Outdoor Advertising Association  
California Clean Money Campaign

**Support:** Alliance for Democracy  
California Common Cause  
Courage California  
Indivisible Green Team  
League of Women Voters of California  
Money Out Voters In

**Oppose:** None received

-- END --



This bill:

- 1) Requires the Legislative Analyst, instead of the AG, to prepare the circulating title and summary of a proposed ballot measure. The AG, who still conducts the public review process, must transmit all public comments and amendments to the Legislative Analyst to use when drafting the ballot title and summary.
- 2) Requires the Legislative Analyst, instead of the AG, to prepare the ballot title and summary for all measures submitted to the voters of the state. The AG must invite public comments for the Legislative Analyst to consider when preparing each ballot title and summary.
- 3) Makes other conforming changes.
- 4) Provides the provisions of this bill are contingent upon the approval of SCA 3 by voters.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Legislative Analyst's Office. The Legislative Analyst oversees the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) and provides fiscal and policy advice to the Legislature. The office is overseen by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC), a 16-member bipartisan joint committee of the Legislature. According to their website, the office has 43 analytical staff and approximately 13 support staff and covers the following budget and policy areas: criminal justice, state finance, education (including K-12 and higher education), health and human services, natural resources and environment, general government (including local government), transportation, and capital outlay and infrastructure.

Historically, one of the most central responsibilities of the LAO has been to analyze the annual Governor's budget. The office is a staff resource to the Legislature and performs the following functions:

- Reviews requests by the Governor's administration to make changes to the budget after it is enacted. These reviews are used primarily by members of the JLBC and the fiscal committees.
- Prepares special reports on the state budget and topics of interest to the Legislature.
- Estimates the fiscal effect on state and local government of all proposed initiatives (prior to circulation) and prepares analyses of all measures that qualify for the statewide ballot.
- Forecasts the state revenues and expenditures.

### **COMMENTS**

- 1) Author's Statement. This bill will reform the process by which a ballot measure's title and summary are written by transferring the duty of preparing the ballot title and summary for all proposed initiative or referendum measures from the AG to the LAO.

This bill would help alleviate the partisanship involved in drafting a ballot initiative's title and summary, by moving the responsibility to the Legislative Analyst, the entity that prepares the impartial analysis of ballot initiative measures. Having a nonpartisan official responsible for writing a ballot measure's title and summary, allows for an unbiased perspective. The LAO is a trusted source that can provide such a solution.

- 2) SB 458 (Niello) of 2025. Last year, this committee considered and approved SB 458 (Niello) of 2025. The language in this bill, SB 1225, is largely consistent with the contents in SB 458. One notable difference between the two bills is that this bill keeps the duties of inviting and receiving public comments for the circulating title and summary and the ballot title and summary with the AG who then submits the comments to the Legislative Analyst.
- 3) Legislative Analyst. The initiative and referendum process was originally designed to be an alternative to the legislative process. While viewed as a nonpartisan position, the Legislative Analyst is appointed by the Legislature. If tools of initiative and referendum were intended to circumvent the legislative process, the committee should consider whether the Legislative Analyst is the appropriate person to provide this essential information to voters.
- 4) Argument in Support. In a letter supporting this bill, the League of Women Voters of California (League) stated, in part, the following:

After studying the initiative and referendum process, the League believes that the title and summary of ballot measures should be written by an impartial and nonpartisan official authority. The LAO has a distinguished history of conducting itself in a fair manner that is insulated from political pressure, thus making it an ideal office to assign this important responsibility. An impartial and nonpartisan authority would ensure that voters receive accurate and unbiased information on which to base their decisions.

Voters want clarity, transparency, and fairness in the initiative and referendum process.

- 5) Argument in Opposition. In a letter opposing this bill, the California Teachers Association stated, in part, the following:

The duty of creating a neutral title and summary is a serious public trust that requires transparency. There is no evidence suggesting the current process is biased or that Attorneys General have failed in this duty; when claims of failure have arisen, the legal system has successfully adjudicated them. Shifting this essential duty to the unelected and unaccountable LAO would be poor policy and would discount a system that has historically served California well.

#### **RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

SCA 3 (Niello) of 2026, if approved by voters, transfers the duties of preparing the circulating title and summary for proposed initiatives or referenda, the ballot label, and

the title and summary for the state voter information guide for statewide ballot measures appearing on a ballot from the AG to the Legislative Analyst.

SB 458 (Niello) of 2025 was a companion bill for SCA 3 (Niello) and was similar to this bill. The bill was approved by this committee, but held on the Senate Committee on Appropriations' Suspense File.

SCA 3 (Niello) of 2023 and SB 858 (Niello) of 2023 would have amended the California Constitution to require the Legislative Analyst, instead of the AG, to prepare the ballot title and summary for all measures submitted to the voters. Both measures were held on the Senate Committee on Appropriations' Suspense File.

ACA 4 (Kiley) of 2021 would have transferred from the AG to the Legislative Analyst the duty of preparing the title and summary for a proposed initiative or referendum, the ballot label, and the ballot title and summary for the state voter information guide. ACA 4 was not heard and was returned to the Assembly Desk.

AB 2394 (Gorell) of 2014 would have required the SOS, instead of the AG, to prepare the ballot label and the ballot title and summary for all state measures submitted to the voters and the circulating title and summary for initiative and referendum measures. AB 2394 was not heard by an Assembly policy committee.

SCA 19 (Fuller) of 2012 and SB 1296 (Fuller) of 2012 would have transferred the duty of preparing the title and summary for proposed initiative or referendum measures from the AG to the Legislative Analyst. Both measures failed passage in this committee.

AB 1968 (Niello) of 2010, among other provisions, would have required the Legislative Analyst, instead of the AG to prepare a circulating title and summary of the chief purpose and points of a proposed state initiative or referendum measure. The bill failed passage in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

AB 319 (Niello) and ACA 20 (Niello) of 2009 would have required the Legislative Analyst, instead of the AG, to prepare a circulating title and summary of the chief purpose and points of a proposed state initiative or referendum measure. Both measures failed passage in the Assembly Committee on Elections and Redistricting.

AB 2209 (Niello) of 2008 was substantively similar to AB 319 of 2009 and failed passage in the Assembly Committee on Elections and Redistricting.

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** Author

**Support:** California Chamber of Commerce  
California Common Cause  
Election Integrity Project California, Inc.  
League of Women Voters of California

**Oppose:** AFSCME

California Conference Board of the Amalgamated Transit Union  
California Conference of Machinists  
California Federation of Labor Unions, AFL-CIO  
California Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO  
California Nurses Association  
California Professional Firefighters  
California Teachers Association  
CFT — A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO  
Engineers and Scientists of California/IFPTE, Local 20  
UNITE HERE  
Utility Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO

**-- END --**



- 2) Requires, prior to circulating for signatures, a copy of an initiative or referendum petition be submitted to the Legislative Analyst instead of the AG for the purpose of preparing the circulating title and summary for a statewide ballot measure.
- 3) Transfers the duties of preparing the ballot label and the title and summary for the state voter information guide for measures appearing on a statewide ballot from the AG to the Legislative Analyst.
- 4) Makes other technical and conforming changes.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Legislative Analyst's Office. The Legislative Analyst oversees the Legislative Analyst's Office and provides fiscal and policy advice to the Legislature. The office is overseen by the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC), a 16-member bipartisan joint committee of the Legislature. According to their website, the office has 43 analytical staff and approximately 13 support staff and covers the following budget and policy areas: criminal justice, state finance, education (including K-12 and higher education), health and human services, natural resources and environment, general government (including local government), transportation, and capital outlay and infrastructure.

Historically, one of the most central responsibilities of the Legislative Analyst's Office has been to analyze the annual Governor's budget. The office is a staff resource to the Legislature and performs the following functions:

- Reviews requests by the Governor's administration to make changes to the budget after it is enacted. These reviews are used primarily by members of the JLBC and the Legislature's fiscal committees.
- Prepares special reports on the state budget and topics of interest to the Legislature.
- Estimates the fiscal effect on state and local government of all proposed initiatives (prior to circulation) and prepares analyses of all measures that qualify for the statewide ballot.
- Forecasts the state revenues and expenditures.

### **COMMENTS**

- 1) Author's Statement. This measure, accompanied by SB 1225 (Niello) of 2026, will reform the process by which a ballot measure's title and summary are written by transferring the duty of preparing the ballot title and summary for all proposed initiative or referendum measures from the AG to the Legislative Analyst.

This would help alleviate the partisanship involved in drafting a ballot initiative's title and summary, by moving the responsibility to the Legislative Analyst, the entity that prepares the impartial analysis of ballot initiative measures. Having a nonpartisan official responsible for writing the title and summary, allows for an unbiased perspective. The Legislative Analyst's Office is a trusted source that can provide such a solution.

- 2) Legislative Analyst. The initiative and referendum process was originally designed to be an alternative to the legislative process. While viewed as a nonpartisan position, the Legislative Analyst is appointed by the Legislature. If tools of initiative and referendum were intended to circumvent the legislative process, the committee should consider whether the Legislative Analyst is the appropriate person to provide this essential information to voters.
- 3) Argument in Support. In a letter supporting this measure, Election Integrity Project California, Inc., stated, the following:

The office of AG is, by nature, highly partisan, and is therefore more likely, intentionally or otherwise, to misrepresent the purpose, description and financial impact of the proposition, which may confuse or mislead the electorate.

The public trust of the California government, its officials and its systems is in dire need of repair. Removing the AG from the process of title and summary is one necessary part of that repair.

- 4) Arguments in Opposition. In a letter opposing this measure, the California School Employees Association stated, in part, the following:

SCA 3 would take the referendum and ballot initiative title and summary preparation out of the hands of the AG who is elected by the people and places it in the hands of the Legislative Analyst's Office, an unelected body that is not accountable to voters and already has tremendous responsibilities to provide support to the Legislature. This would diminish the voice of California voters in the referendum process.

### **RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

SB 1225 (Niello) of 2026 is a companion bill for this measure and makes corresponding changes should this measure be adopted by the Legislature and subsequently approved by voters. The language in the bill is largely similar to SB 458 (Niello) of 2025. SB 458 was approved by this committee, but was held on the Senate Committee on Appropriations' Suspense File.

SCA 3 (Niello) of 2023 and SB 858 (Niello) of 2023 would have amended the California Constitution to require the Legislative Analyst, instead of the AG, to prepare the ballot title and summary for all measures submitted to the voters. Both measures were held on the Senate Committee on Appropriations' Suspense File.

ACA 4 (Kiley) of 2021 would have transferred from the AG to the Legislative Analyst the duty of preparing the title and summary for a proposed initiative or referendum, the ballot label, and the ballot title and summary for the state voter information guide. ACA 4 was not heard and was returned to the Assembly Desk.

AB 2394 (Gorell) of 2014 would have required the SOS, instead of the AG, to prepare the ballot label and the ballot title and summary for all state measures submitted to the voters and the circulating title and summary for initiative and referendum measures. AB 2394 was not heard by an Assembly policy committee.

SCA 19 (Fuller) of 2012 and SB 1296 (Fuller) of 2012 would have transferred the duty of preparing the title and summary for proposed initiative or referendum measures from the AG to the Legislative Analyst. Both measures failed passage in this committee.

AB 1968 (Niello) of 2010, among other provisions, would have required the Legislative Analyst, instead of the AG to prepare a circulating title and summary of the chief purpose and points of a proposed state initiative or referendum measure. The bill failed passage in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

AB 319 (Niello) and ACA 20 (Niello) of 2009 would have required the Legislative Analyst, instead of the AG, to prepare a circulating title and summary of the chief purpose and points of a proposed state initiative or referendum measure. Both measures failed passage in the Assembly Committee on Elections and Redistricting.

AB 2209 (Niello) of 2008 was substantively similar to AB 319 of 2009 and failed passage in the Assembly Committee on Elections and Redistricting.

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** Author

**Support:** California Chamber of Commerce  
California Common Cause  
Election Integrity Project California, Inc.  
Five individuals

**Oppose:** California School Employees Association, AFL-CIO  
CFT — A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO

**-- END --**



- 6) Prohibits the filing officer from waiving this penalty when the Form 700 is still not filed 30 days after the filing officer sends the filer a specific written notice of the requirement to file, unless that person is filing as a candidate.
- 7) Limits the amount of this penalty to the greater of \$100 or the cumulative amount stated in the late statement or report.

This bill:

- 1) Extends the time during which a filing officer may waive the \$10 per day penalty for late statements of economic interest to 30 days after the filing officer refers the matter to the FPPC.
- 2) Applies this change in 1) of this bill to all filers of statements of economic interest, including candidates.
- 3) Deletes the \$10 per day penalty on filers who file their original statement or report but do not file copies with other agencies. This applies to all statements and reports required under the PRA.
- 4) Makes clarifying and technical changes.

### **BACKGROUND**

Proposition 9, which appeared on the June 1974 ballot, created the PRA and established California's campaign finance and disclosure laws for state and local campaigns, candidates, officeholders, and ballot measures. Proposition 9 also created the FPPC to implement, administer, and enforce the PRA.

The PRA defines conflicts of interest for public officials, requires public agencies to adopt conflict of interest codes, and requires public officials and designated public agency officials to disclose their financial interests. Designated employees are specified in an agency's conflict of interest code. Disclosure of financial interests occurs through filing of the statement of economic interests, FPPC Form 700.

The PRA also requires candidates for elective office, committees formed to support or oppose candidates for public office or ballot measures, slate mailer organizations, and other specified entities, to file periodic and activity-based campaign statements and reports disclosing contributions, expenditures, and other related matters.

Violations of the PRA generally are subject to administrative, civil, and criminal penalties. Civil and criminal enforcement actions are rare, however, and enforcement actions for violations of the PRA typically are brought through the FPPC's administrative enforcement process.

### **COMMENTS**

- 1) Author's Statement. This is a good governance bill that modernizes campaign finance reporting by ensuring filers are not penalized with daily fines for simply forgetting to submit a duplicate copy of their Form 700. This bill creates a more

reasonable system that forgives honest mistakes while maintaining firm accountability for actual violations.

- 2) More time. FPPC regulations require filing officers, who receive Form 700s from designated employees and public officials, to refer those who do not file to the FPPC. The filing officer must first make two attempts to reach the filer associated with an apparent violation and provide information about the attempts when reporting the apparent violation to the FPPC. FPPC staff reports this process can take as long as several months, and it is this time that the bill adds to the waiver period for penalties.
- 3) Arguments in Support. The FPPC, the bill's sponsor, states that this bill extension of the penalty waiver period is needed because:

Filing officers at the FPPC have encountered many situations where late fees for Form 700s filed beyond the 30-day window would be reasonably and justifiably waived, but filing officers are unable to grant the waiver due to the existing time limit. For example, FPPC filing officers have noted that waiver would be appropriate for first-time filers who were not aware of their filing duties, or filings that were late due to technical errors or errors made by the local filing officer, even beyond the current 30-day limit.

[This bill] extends the waiver period to within 30 days after a referral for the late or missing filing is filed with the FPPC.

- 4) CARS. In 2000, pursuant to SB 49 (Karnette), Chapter 866, Statutes of 1997, the Secretary of State (SOS) deployed a system called the California Automated Lobby Activity and Campaign Contribution and Expenditure Search System, or Cal-Access. Cal-Access replaced the paper-based system and provides online filing of reports and statements required by the PRA. It also provides online access to these statements and reports for the public.

Cal-Access is now 27 years old. Due to its age and associated shortcomings, SB 1349 (Hertzberg), Chapter 845, Statutes of 2016, directed the SOS, in consultation with the FPPC, to replace Cal-Access with a new disclosure system, the Cal-Access Replacement System or CARS. The SOS expects to fully deploy CARS later this year.

AB 808 (Addis), Chapter 278, Statutes of 2025, updated language throughout the PRA to conform it with filings being made via CARS when it begins to operate. AB 808 takes effect when the SOS certifies that CARS is operational.

This bill amends the same code section twice, once as it is operative today and once as it will be operative when the SOS certifies CARS.

- 5) How Much Total Penalty? Existing law caps the total amount of the \$10 per day penalty at the greater of either \$100 or the cumulative amount stated in the late statement or report. It is unclear what the amount "stated in the late statement or report" means, especially when referring to the Form 700. The author may wish to consider an amendment to clarify this provision of existing law, as for filings of Form

700s, the bill is extending the period over which any cumulative penalty would likely accrue.

**POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** Fair Political Practices Commission

**Support:** None received

**Oppose:** None received

**-- END --**



fully exclude the value of a disabled veteran's property, but instead adjusts the exemption based on household income.

This measure asks the people of the State of California to amend Article XIII of the California Constitution to:

- 1) Permit a qualifying taxpayer to claim both the homeowners' exemption and one or both of the veterans' exemptions.
- 2) Allow the Legislature through statute to increase the current \$4,000 amount of the veterans' exemption to a higher amount, provided it does not exceed the full value of the property.
- 3) Delete the property value limits that make a person ineligible.
- 4) Add the United States Space Force to the list of branches of the military service that make a veteran eligible for the veterans' exemption.
- 5) Delete obsolete language and make conforming changes.

### **BACKGROUND**

Homeowners' Exemption. The California Constitution exempts \$7,000 in taxable value of a home when it is the principal place of residence of the owner on January 1st of the year the exemption is claimed, unless the taxpayer claims another exemption, such as a veteran's exemption. State law precludes a property that is rented, vacant, under construction on the lien date, or is a vacation or secondary home. The property must be the taxpayer's true, fixed and permanent home, and principal establishment to which they intend to return if absent.

Once granted, the homeowner's exemption continues until the taxpayer notifies the assessor of ownership changes. The Constitution allows the Legislature to increase the exemption but requires the Legislature to increase subventions to local agencies backfilling any revenue loss and provide an increase in benefits to qualified renters.

Veterans' Exemption. The Constitution contains an exemption for veterans, which it defines as someone who is serving, or has served in and has been discharged under honorable conditions from service, in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or Revenue Marine (Revenue Cutter) Service; and served in any of the following:

- In time of war;
- In time of peace in a campaign or expedition for which a medal has been issued to the veteran by Congress; or
- In time of peace and because of a service-connected disability was released from active duty.

State statute deems 26 wars and four campaigns as qualifying for the veterans' exemptions in statute. Most of the wars and campaigns listed occurred over 100 years ago, dating back to the Revolutionary War. The exemption reduces taxable value by

\$1,000 (adjusted to \$4,000 in statute) for a person qualifying under the above criteria, or their unmarried surviving spouse or either parent of a deceased veteran meeting the service requirements.

The Constitution only allows the exemption for veterans who own property, real or personal, worth less in aggregate than \$5,000 if the claimant is single, or \$10,000 if married. According to California Board of Equalization, at its peak, from 1956 through 1962, over one million persons received the veterans' exemption. The constitutional restrictions for the exemption have, however, rendered it obsolete, so much so that, only one person received the exemption in 2018-19. This exemption has also fallen into disuse because at only \$4,000, any veteran who owns a home can instead claim the homeowners' exemption of \$7,000, which provides greater tax savings.

Disabled Veterans' Exemption. Section 4 of Article XIII allows the Legislature to partially or wholly exempt from property tax the value of a disabled veteran's principal place of residence if the veteran has lost two or more limbs, is totally blind, or is totally disabled as a result of a service-connected injury. The taxpayer must have served in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, Coast Guard, or Marine Corps and been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. This disabled veterans' exemption is available to disabled veteran taxpayers or their unmarried surviving spouses, so long as the surviving spouse receives a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs determination that the spouse's death was service-connected. The exemption applies instead of other real property exemptions, like the homeowners' exemption.

State law implementing the exemption provides a partial exemption of \$100,000 for disabled veteran taxpayers with annual household income of more than \$40,000, or \$150,000 for income less than \$40,000, with each threshold adjusted annually for inflation by the Department of Industrial Relations using the California Consumer Price Index for all items. The current inflation adjusted value for 2025 is \$175,298 for disabled veterans with income of more than \$78,718 and \$262,950 for those with less than \$78,718.

### COMMENTS

- 1) Author's Statement. Veterans have made significant sacrifices in service to our country. They have put their lives on the line, spent time away from their families, and faced numerous physical and mental challenges in their pursuit of safety and security for our country. Despite all of this, many veterans continue to face difficulties as they transition back to civilian life. One of the biggest challenges veterans face is the financial burden of owning a home. For many veterans, owning a home can be a difficult dream to achieve and maintain. Many veterans struggle to make ends meet despite their service, especially if they are on a fixed income or facing other financial challenges.

In California, the current veterans' exemption provides veterans and their families with a \$4,000 reduction in the taxable value of their property to help ease the financial burden of owning a home. This lifeline can be especially important for veterans who are facing other challenges such as medical bills or disabilities as a result of their service. Unfortunately, the amount of the current veteran exemption has remained the same since its creation, along with limitations on the maximum

eligible value of a property owned by a veteran. Furthermore, because the homeowners' exemption is nearly twice the amount of the veteran exemption at \$7,000, most California veteran homeowners choose the homeowners' exemption, leaving the veterans' exemption underutilized.

This measure and its companion bill, SB 623 (Archuleta), seek to allow a veteran property owner who qualifies for the veterans' exemption or the disabled veterans' exemption to also receive the homeowners' exemption. These measures will provide much needed tax relief for veterans and their families. In California, we have a proud tradition of supporting our veterans. We recognize the sacrifices that they have made, and we are committed to providing them with the support they need to succeed and stay here in California after their service.

- 2) Arguments in Support. The Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association writes in support of the bill:

The veterans' exemption, as currently prescribed in the state Constitution, is effectively obsolete. The veterans' exemption is not adjusted for inflation. As such, the exemptions value remains the same at \$4,000, the equivalent of \$40 dollars in real terms, along with the limitations on the maximum total value of property owned by the veteran to remain eligible for the exemption.

Moreover, the homeowners' property tax exemption is nearly twice the amount of the veteran's exemption (\$7,000 or \$70). Both exemptions prohibit application of the other exemption. In other words, it is extremely unlikely that a veteran property owner would claim the veteran's exemption.

There is some disagreement over how many people in the state claim the veteran's exemption. But the estimates range from zero to two.

### **RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

SB 623 (Archuleta) makes changes to statute to implement SCA 4's constitutional change to allow eligible taxpayers to also claim both the homeowners' as well as either the disabled veterans' or veterans' exemption. This bill passed the Senate and is pending action in the Assembly.

SCA 6 (Archuleta) of 2023 was nearly identical to this measure. SCA 6 passed the Senate, but the Assembly took no action on the measure.

### **PRIOR ACTION**

Senate Committee on Governance and Finance: 5-0

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** Author

**Support:** American Legion, Department of California  
AMVETS-Department of California

California Association of Realtors  
California State Board of Equalization  
California State Commanders Veterans Council  
Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association  
Military Officers Association of America-California Council of Chapters  
Vietnam Veterans of America-California State Council

**Oppose:** None received.

**-- END --**



determined at least 3% of the voting age residents in a county or precinct are members of a single language minority and lack sufficient skills in English to vote without assistance. Four facsimile ballots and related instructions must be available at a polling place in Spanish or other languages in which the SOS has determined more than 20% of voting age residents in a county or precinct are members of a single language minority and lack sufficient skills in English to vote without assistance.

- 4) Requires a county that conducts elections using vote centers pursuant to the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA) to provide language assistance, translated election materials, and information regarding the availability of language assistance in all languages required in the jurisdiction.
- 5) Requires VCA counties to establish language accessibility advisory committees (LAAC).
- 6) Provides a county elections official is not required to provide facsimile copies of the ballot in a particular language if they are required to provide translated ballots in that language pursuant to federal law.
- 7) Requires the SOS to establish a statewide LAAC to help it implement federal and state laws relating to access to the electoral process by limited English proficiency voters.

This bill:

- 1) Requires the SOS to determine the counties that meet at least one of the following criteria:
  - a) At least 5,000 voting age citizens who are limited English proficient individuals and are either members of a single language minority group or speak a shared language.
  - b) At least 5% of voting age citizens who are limited English proficient individuals and are either member of a single language minority group or speak a shared language.
  - c) For political subdivisions containing any or all parts of an Indian reservation, the number of voting age American Indian or Alaskan Native citizens within the Indian reservation who are limited English proficient individuals is more than 5% of all residents of the reservation.
- 2) Requires the SOS, on or before December 15, 2028, to use the criteria in 1) of this bill to publish the list of counties and the languages in which each county is required to provide language access. Following the 2028 county and language determinations, the SOS must make and publish updated determinations beginning on or before December 15, 2031, and on or before December 15 of every fifth year thereafter.

- 3) Requires county election officials, beginning in January 1, 2027, to use existing language determinations prescribed by Section 203 of the VRA and to translate the materials and activities listed in 4) below.
- 4) Requires election officials to provide language assistance for the following election-related materials and services: ballots, voter registration forms and instructions, voter education and outreach materials, voting-related notices, notices of in-language assistance availability, in-person bilingual poll workers and interpreters, live telephonic interpretation services, and websites.
- 5) Provides that whenever the SOS or any state agency provides, in any manner, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or services to voters relating to elections, registration, or voting in counties subject to the requirements provided by this bill, the SOS or the state agency must also comply with the requirements provided by this bill.
- 6) Requires that all materials and services provided by the state or counties in a language other than English must be distributed at the same time as the corresponding English materials.
- 7) Provides a process for interested citizens and entities to provide evidence to the SOS demonstrating a significant need exists for translated election materials for a language not part of the language determinations by the SOS. If a preponderance of evidence is provided, then the SOS must require materials and services to be provided in the requested language.
- 8) Permits the SOS to adopt any rules or regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this bill.

### **BACKGROUND**

Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA). In 1965, Congress passed and President Johnson signed the VRA. The VRA provides, among other provisions, that “[n]o voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge that right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.”

In 1975, Congress adopted the language minority provisions of Sections 4(f)(4) and 203 of the VRA and extended these provisions in 1982, 1992, and 2006. Sections 4(f)(4) and 203 provides when a covered state or political subdivision “[p]rovides registration or voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials or information relating to the electoral process, including ballots, it shall provide them in the language of the applicable minority group as well as in the English language.” These determinations are based on data from the most recent census.

In 2013, the United States Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) 570 U.S. 529, invalidated the formula used to determine which jurisdictions are subject to the language requirements in Section 4(f)(4) of the VRA, and the VRA has not been amended since then to create a new formula. As a result, while Section 4(f)(4) remains

a part of the VRA, no jurisdictions are required to provide language assistance under its provisions. Section 203 was not affected by the ruling.

Census Data. On December 8, 2021, the United States Census Bureau released its most recent determination of minority language requirements under Section 203 of the VRA. California is required to provide bilingual voting assistance to Spanish speakers in all elections throughout the state, and nine counties (Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara) are required to provide voting materials in at least one language other than English and Spanish.

State law requires the SOS, in each gubernatorial election year, to determine the precincts where 3% or more of the voting age residents are members of a single language minority group and lack sufficient skills in English to vote without assistance. According to a memo from the SOS from December 31, 2021, the office contracted with the California Statewide Database at the University of California, Berkeley to determine which precincts have reached the 3% threshold for single language minorities.

Due to stricter census privacy disclosure rules, counties saw a major reduction in populations that met the 3% threshold, meaning ballots and other election materials needed to be translated into fewer languages. The memo encouraged counties to work with community groups to determine if a need exists for any of the previously covered languages before eliminating the use of materials in languages.

On March 1, 2022, the SOS essentially reversed course and reinstated the prior precinct minority language determinations. The SOS found sufficient reason to believe it was necessary to reinstate the 2017 and 2020 minority language assistance determinations to ensure communities have access to language assistance services. In December 2025, the SOS issued new language determinations for elections in 2026.

California Voting for All Act & Previous Legislation. In 2017, in an effort to reduce barriers and improve language access and assistance for voters who identify as limited-English proficient voters, the Legislature approved, and Governor Brown signed AB 918 (Bonta), Chapter 845, Statutes of 2017. AB 918 expanded the availability and accessibility of facsimile ballots in languages other than English in situations where such facsimile ballots are required to be made available pursuant to existing law.

During the 2023-24 legislative session, AB 884 (Low) of 2024 would have required the SOS to make additional language determinations and would have required the translation of additional election-related materials, such as forms and ballots. Governor Newsom vetoed AB 884. The Governor's veto message included the following:

While I support the author's goal of expanding language access and resources in our elections, this bill would create new, ongoing general fund cost pressures in the tens of millions of dollars not included in the 2024 Budget Act. In partnership with the Legislature this year, my Administration has enacted a balanced budget that avoids deep program cuts to vital services and protected investments in education, health care, climate, public safety, housing, and social service programs that millions of Californians rely on. It is important to remain disciplined when

considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget, such as this measure. For this reason, I cannot sign this bill.

SB 266 (Cervantes) of 2025 would have provided a similar framework as AB 884 by expanding the number of applicable languages and the types of election-related materials needing to be translated. Depending on the language, this could have been various forms or instructions and voteable ballots. The bill was held in the Senate Committee on Appropriations' Suspense File.

### **COMMENTS**

- 1) **Author's Statement.** Section 203 of the federal VRA guarantees language access assistance to lawfully registered voters in the United States who speak Spanish, an Asian language, or a native language if the population in a jurisdiction exceeds certain thresholds. However, barring congressional action to reauthorize it, Section 203 is set to expire in 2032. Whatever might happen in Washington, D.C. in the future, lawfully registered voters in California should have a voice in our government, regardless of whether they are fluent in English or have limited English proficiency. This bill will help the more than 3.2 million lawfully registered voters in California who self-identify as limited-English proficient cast a ballot by making translated election materials more available and accessible. It will accomplish this by codifying Section 203 protections in state law and expanding on Section 203 to provide language access assistance beyond the group of languages required by federal law.
- 2) **Additional Language Assistance.** This bill would increase the number of languages by lowering the population thresholds and making it applicable to languages beyond those specified in the federal VRA. According to the sponsors of the bill, the California Democracy Partnership (Partnership), it is estimated that at least 12 counties would see an increase of at least one language where the county would need to provide translated services. Based on a preliminary analysis of data from the American Community Survey, the Partnership noted that the following counties may be affected: Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Joaquin, Santa Cruz, Solano, and Yolo counties. The Partnership also projected the languages that would be added to the current coverage for the translation of most voter-related materials to include: Arabic, Armenian, Chinese languages, Farsi, Filipino/Tagalog, Hindi, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, Thai, and Vietnamese.
- 3) **Berkeley IGS Poll.** On April 2, 2026, the Berkeley Institute of Governmental Studies released the finding of a poll that signaled support for a legislative proposal to expand language access and services in elections. The question stated:

“Would you support or oppose the state offering comprehensive translation and interpreter voting assistance services to populations that do not currently receive them under the federal Voting Rights Act, but account for at least 5% of 5,000 of the voters in the county?”

Of the registered voters that responded, 59% supported the statement, 26% opposed, and 16% did not have an opinion.

- 4) Logistical Concerns. When election officials are required to provide translated materials pursuant to federal law, the officials must translate all election related materials, including ballots and voter information guides. When election officials are required to provide language assistance under state law, the type of assistance required is more limited.

The bill expands the number of election materials that must be translated to include forms, voting notices, and instructions and assistance forms if certain conditions are met. Increasing the amount of election materials to be translated and the number of translated languages likely will improve accessibility to the election process, but also create logistical, timeline, and resource concerns. Due to the limited number of translation vendors, the SOS and many counties already use the same vendors to prepare translated materials. As a result, securing a translation services contract may be even more competitive for election officials and would add more time to an already compressed election calendar.

### **RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

SB 266 (Cervantes) of 2025 would have expanded the number of applicable language and the types of election-related materials needing to be translated, including voteable ballots. The bill was held in the Senate Committee on Appropriations' Suspense File.

AB 72 (Jackson) of 2025 would have required election officials to provide registration notices, forms, instructions, assistance, ballots, and other materials or information relating to the electoral process in Bengali, if requested by a voter. The contents of the bill was removed and now reflect another legislative subject.

AB 884 (Low) of 2024 would have requires the SOS to make additional language determinations and the translation of additional election-related materials, such as forms and ballots. AB 884 was vetoed by Governor Newsom.

AB 1631 (Cervantes), Chapter 552, Statutes of 2022, requires a county elections official to post on their website a list of all polling places where multilingual poll workers will be present and the language or languages in which they will provide assistance. It also requires county election officials to use the internet in their efforts to recruit multilingual poll workers.

AB 918 (Bonta), Chapter 845, Statutes of 2017, expands the availability and accessibility of facsimile ballots in languages other than English in situations where such facsimile ballots are required to be made available pursuant to existing law.

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** The California Democracy Partnership  
 AAPIs for Civic Empowerment  
 ACLU California Action  
 Asian Law Caucus  
 California Common Cause  
 California Environmental Voters  
 Catalyst California

Inland Empire United  
League of Women Voters of California  
Legal Defense Fund  
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)  
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans  
SEIU California  
UCLA Voting Rights Project

**Support:** Black Leadership Council  
California Clean Money Campaign  
California Domestic Workers Coalition  
CFT – A Union of Educators & Classified Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO  
Courage California  
Dēmos  
Dolores Huerta Foundation  
FairVote Action  
Hmong Innovating Politics  
NextGen California  
Starting Over Inc.  
Starting Over Strong  
VietRISE  
Western Center on Law and Poverty

**Oppose:** None received

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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**  
Senator Scott Wiener, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 1418 **Hearing Date:** 4/21/26  
**Author:** Cervantes  
**Version:** 3/24/26  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** No  
**Consultant:** Scott Matsumoto

**Subject:** Elections officials: meetings.

**DIGEST**

This bill increases from three to four per year the maximum number of meetings the Secretary of State (SOS) may convene with election officials in California.

**ANALYSIS**

Existing law:

- 1) Provides the SOS is the chief elections officer of the state.
- 2) Permits the SOS, on written call, to convene a maximum of three meetings in any calendar year with county election officials, city election officials, and registrars of voters to discuss matters affecting the administration of election laws and to promote uniformity of procedure in those matters. Any deputy of a county elections official, city elections official, or registrar of voters designated by their principal may attend these meetings.

This bill:

- 1) Increases the maximum number of meetings the SOS may convene with California's election officials from three to four meetings in a calendar year.
- 2) Makes technical changes.

**COMMENTS**

- 1) Author's Statement. Under existing law, the SOS can summon elections officials to meet to discuss state elections laws to ensure uniformity in the administration of those laws. The number of these meetings is limited to three per calendar year. In order to better promote uniformity in elections administration across California, this bill would increase the number of meetings the SOS may call from three to four per calendar year.
- 2) Election Administration in California. Elections in California are conducted at the local level. This task is typically completed by county elections officials who also serve as registrars of voters, though city election officials (i.e., city clerks) can

administer city elections. Jurisdictions must follow state laws, but interpretation and implementation of these laws may vary. To bring more uniformity when implementing the Elections Code, as California's chief elections official, the SOS can promulgate regulations, provide guidance to local election officials, and/or call up to three formal meetings every calendar year with election officials.

- 3) Communication between the SOS and Election Officials. The SOS and election officials meet periodically and communicate frequently throughout the year. While not a formal meeting, the SOS and election officials meet at conferences throughout the year, and the SOS convenes a monthly call with county election officials to update them on various election-related matters.

### **RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

SB 1842 (John F. McCarthy), Chapter 1883, Statutes of 1955, added the ability for the SOS, on written call, to convene a maximum number of three meetings with election officials in a calendar year.

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** Author

**Support:** None received

**Oppose:** None received

**-- END --**



- b) The board of supervisors authorizes the elections official to receive resolutions and consolidate elections without seeking new approval by the board of supervisors for each election.
- 2) Provides that the county elections official, instead of the board of supervisors, is authorized to canvass the returns of a local bond election. A local jurisdiction's governing body may authorize the county elections official, instead of the board of supervisors, to canvass the returns of an election for the jurisdiction that is consolidated with an election held in the county.
- 3) Removes the limitation of 12 instruction cards to be at each polling location.
- 4) Specifies that a precinct board member, instead of the precinct board, is required to proclaim aloud that the polls have opened and closed.
- 5) Makes technical and conforming changes.

### **BACKGROUND**

Canvassing an Election. Current law allows entities to authorize county boards of supervisors to canvass the returns of the election. This conflicts with other provisions of the Elections Code relating to the canvass and the duties of county election officials. For example, the elections official is required to report the final results of an election to the governing board. If a county board of supervisors is the governing board being elected, the county elections official has the responsibility for conducting the canvass, as the governing board cannot report to itself. This could lead to confusion and unnecessary involvement of boards of supervisors in the election canvass process.

Polling Place Materials and Instruction Cards. In addition to instruction cards, current law requires the Secretary of State or the county elections official to provide specific informational and administrative materials to each polling place. Some of the materials sent to a polling place include an accessible copy of the voter list, an American flag, a ballot container, a sufficient number of cards on how to obtain information about a voter's polling place, name badges, ballots, facsimile copies of the ballot, translated materials for voters, a roster, and various notices relating to election and voting procedures.

Each instruction card is required to have specified instructions and provisions of the Elections Code related to obtaining and marking a voter's ballot. Provisions on the instruction card include Election Day procedures, issuing a ballot, instructions for marking and submitting a ballot, procedures following the closure of a polling place, and Penal Code provisions related to electioneering, vandalism, and voting.

AB 586 (Robertson), Chapter 580, Statutes of 1945, set the range of at least six and not more than 12 instruction cards. Since 1945, while the range of six to 12 instruction cards has remained the same, the wording for where these instruction cards are sent was changed through subsequent legislation to "polling places" and includes polls, polling locations, and vote centers. Vote centers, in particular, may house more than 12 voting stations at a location.

### **COMMENTS**

- 1) Committee Bill. This bill is one of the Senate Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments' committee bills. This bill contains changes requested by the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials and by committee staff.
- 2) Filing Resolutions. Current law requires that a jurisdiction calling for an election do so by filing the original resolution with the board of supervisors *and* a copy with the elections official. Some jurisdictions may only deliver the resolution to one of the two entities. A jurisdiction delivering a resolution to only one of the two locations could be legally challenged even if accepted by an elections official.
- 3) Precinct Boards. A member of the precinct board proclaims aloud that fact when the polls open and close. This bill clarifies that the entire precinct board does not need to announce the opening or closing of a polling location since it is typically announced by an individual board member.
- 4) Look Familiar? A version of SB 851 (Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments) of 2025 contained the provisions in this bill. In the days leading up to the bill's final passage, it was amended in the Assembly to reflect another elections-related topic relating to interference in elections. This bill is nearly identical to the language in SB 851 prior to the measure being amended.

### **RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

SB 851 (Cervantes), Chapter 238, Statutes of 2025, made various changes to state law to protect California's elections from interference. Prior to SB 851 being amended to reflect the language that was ultimately chaptered, it contained many provisions in this bill, SB 1429.

SB 729 (Glazer) of 2021 would have removed the limitation of 12 instruction cards. The bill passed by the Senate, but was not heard by the Assembly.

SB 696 (Umberg) of 2019 would have removed the limitation of 12 instruction cards. The bill was amended in the Assembly to another elections-related subject.

AB 586 (Robertson), Chapter 580, Statutes of 1945, required the county clerk to furnish each precinct with not less than six nor more than 12 instruction cards.

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** Author

**Support:** None received

**Oppose:** None received

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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**  
Senator Scott Wiener, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 1430 **Hearing Date:** 4/21/26  
**Author:** Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments  
**Version:** 4/8/26  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** No  
**Consultant:** Rida Shaikh

**Subject:** Elections

**DIGEST**

This bill conforms the Education Code and the Elections Code to provide the same 125-day deadline to adopt a resolution specifying the date and the purpose of an election and requires the resolution to be delivered to the county superintendent of schools and the officer conducting the election.

**ANALYSIS**

Existing law:

- 1) Requires, pursuant to the Education Code, when an election for governing board members of a school district or community college district is ordered, the governing board of the district, or the board or officer authorized by law to make such designations, to adopt a resolution specifying the date and the purpose of the election. The resolution must be delivered, not fewer than 123 days before the election, to the county superintendent of schools and the officer conducting the election.
- 2) Requires, pursuant to the Elections Code, on the 125th day prior to the day fixed for the general district election, the secretary of the governing body or a person designated by them, to deliver a notice to the county elections official.

This bill:

- 1) Conforms the Education Code and the Elections Code to have the same 125-day deadline to adopt a resolution specifying the date and the purpose of the election and require the resolution to be delivered to the county superintendent of schools and the officer conducting the election.
- 2) Makes technical and clarifying changes.

**BACKGROUND**

Voter's Choice Act. SB 450 (Allen), Chapter 832, Statutes of 2016, created the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA). The VCA, among many other changes, created vote centers. At least one vote center has to be open for every 50,000 registered voters

from the 10th day to the fourth day prior to the election. Counties that opt into the VCA must have vote centers open 10 days prior to Election Day and through Election Day.

### **COMMENTS**

- 1) Committee Bill. This bill is one of the Senate Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments' committee bills and makes changes to the Elections and Education codes. This bill contains changes requested by the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials and by committee staff.
- 2) Same Day Deadline. When a general district election is called, on the 125th day prior to the election, a notice of the election is delivered to the county elections official. When a school board calls an election for governing board members, on the 123rd day prior to the election the resolution is to be delivered to the county superintendent of schools and the elections official. The two days make a difference when it comes to preparing notices and getting things ready for nominations. This bill conforms the Elections Code and Education Code to have the same 125-day deadline.
- 3) Clarifying Changes. Current language in the Elections Code covers how public buildings and school buildings should operate as polling places and vote centers. After the passage of SB 450, which took effect in 2018, election officials had a difficult time finding public buildings that could be used as vote centers for 10 days. AB 2540 (Mullin), Chapter 343, Statutes of 2018, thus required public and school buildings to serve as vote centers if requested by election officials. As AB 2540 added the word vote centers into the code section, the language became more complicated and confusing, such as making it seem like schools used as vote centers could be closed for 10 days. This bill rewrites the code section to clarify how schools and public buildings should operate when used as polling places or vote centers.
- 4) Double Referral. Should this bill pass this committee, it will be referred to the Committee on Education. As recent amendments deleted the provisions related to confirming students as poll workers, it is unlikely the Committee on Education will hear the bill.

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** Author

**Support:** None received

**Oppose:** None received

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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**  
Senator Scott Wiener, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 1431 **Hearing Date:** 4/21/26  
**Author:** Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments  
**Version:** 3/5/26  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Carrie Cornwell

**Subject:** Elections

**DIGEST**

This bill deletes obsolete requirements for a military and overseas voter to apply for a vote by mail (VBM) ballot and makes changes to the process a candidate follows in submitting nomination signatures.

**ANALYSIS**

Existing law:

- 1) Requires every active registered voter to receive a VBM ballot for any election.
- 2) Requires election officials to send ballots not earlier than 60 days but not later than 45 days before an election to military and overseas voters.
- 3) Requires a candidate for office in order to qualify for the ballot to submit nomination papers, which must be signed by voters. The number of registered voters required to sign is as follows:
  - a) For state office or United States Senate, not fewer than 65 nor more than 100;
  - b) For United States House of Representatives, State Senate, State Assembly, Board of Equalization, or any office voted for in more than one county but not statewide, not fewer than 40 nor more than 60;
  - c) Candidacy in a single county or political subdivision thereof, other than Senate or Assembly, not fewer than 20 nor more than 40;
  - d) If there are fewer than 150 voters in the county or district in which the election will be held, not fewer than 10 nor more than 20.

If a candidate submits more than the maximum number of signatures, then the elections official receiving the nomination papers may withdraw the excess signatures.

This bill:

- 1) Deletes obsolete requirements in existing law for a military and overseas voter to apply for a VBM ballot.
- 2) Deletes the upper limit for nomination signatures but maintains the minimum number of signatures for each office.
- 3) Allows candidates to continuously submit signatures until the candidate reaches the required number of signatures on their nomination papers.

### **BACKGROUND**

Military and Overseas Voters. In California, an individual is permitted to register to vote electronically. When registering to vote as a military or overseas voter, a voter can choose to have their ballot mailed, faxed, or emailed to them. Additionally, county election officials begin sending ballots to military and overseas voters 60 days before Election Day. The voter may return the voted ballot to their county elections official by mail or, in certain circumstances, by fax.

VBM Ballot Use in California and Previous Legislation. Over the decades, California voters have increasingly relied on VBM ballots. Since 2012, VBM ballots have constituted the majority of ballots cast.

Legislation enabled this shift. First, AB 1520 (Shelley), Chapter 922, Statutes of 2001, authorized any voter to become a permanent VBM voter. Then SB 450 (Allen), Chapter 832, Statutes of 2016, also known as the Voter's Choice Act, permits counties to opt-in to conducting elections in which every voter receives a VBM ballot and vote centers and ballot drop-off locations are available prior to and on Election Day, in lieu of operating polling places.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, state law temporarily required county election officials to mail a ballot to every active registered voter for the November 3, 2020 statewide general election and for elections held in 2021. AB 37 (Berman), Chapter 312, Statutes of 2021, made that policy permanent for all future elections, and made other changes to the VBM processes, procedures, and requirements. AB 37 and subsequent bills have removed references to applying for a VBM ballot from state law.

### **COMMENTS**

- 1) Committee Bill. The Senate Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee is authoring this bill to make a number of noncontroversial changes to the Elections Code. The Secretary of State (SOS) requested all changes currently included in this bill.
- 2) VBM Applications for Military and Overseas Voters. As the requirement to mail a ballot to every active registered voter originally was a temporary accommodation for elections held during the pandemic, corresponding changes were not made to related provisions of California law, including some language requiring a voter to apply for a VBM ballot. AB 37 established the statewide practice of mailing every

voter a VBM ballot for every election, based on that prior legislation. It did not make many related conforming or cleanup changes. Cleanup bills over the ensuing years have made many conforming and clarifying changes to reflect the changes AB 37 made to the distribution of ballots. This bill continues that practice with the remaining provisions of law governing military and overseas voters.

- 3) Nomination Signatures. This bill amends the Elections Code to remove the upper limits on the number of nomination signatures a candidate may submit and also explicitly allows candidates to continuously submit signatures until reaching the minimum number of required signatures. SOS staff report that some counties have been handling nomination signatures in ways that have required the SOS to intervene on behalf of candidates. This bill clarifies existing law to ensure candidates are treated fairly and the same across jurisdictions.
- 4) Arguments in Support. Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D., writing as the bill's sponsor, states that the bill contains two critical provisions, which will serve to facilitate smooth elections going forward. First, it removes incorrect references and requirements for military or overseas voters, and second, it improves the signature submission process for candidates when submitting nomination papers. Secretary Weber notes that the changes will reduce confusion surrounding requirements for military and overseas voters and will simplify requirements for candidate filing.

### **POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** California Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D.

**Support:** None received

**Oppose:** None received

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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**  
Senator Scott Wiener, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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**Bill No:** SB 1432 **Hearing Date:** 4/21/26  
**Author:** Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments  
**Version:** 4/14/26  
**Urgency:** No **Fiscal:** Yes  
**Consultant:** Rida Shaikh

**Subject:** Political Reform Act of 1974: gifts

**DIGEST**

This bill authorizes the Fair Political Practices Commission (FFPC) to have greater flexibility in classifying nonclerical positions, expands the state offices for which a candidate must file their statement of intention online or electronically with the Secretary of State (SOS) to include judicial offices, increases the minimum text size of a required statement to 10-point Roman boldface type, and makes technical changes.

**ANALYSIS**

Existing Law:

- 1) Prohibits the FPPC from including a nonclerical position in the same class in the civil service classification plan with any position of any other department or agency.
- 2) Requires, before becoming a candidate for a specific office, an individual shall file a statement of intention to be a candidate, signed under penalty of perjury. An individual who intends to be a candidate for elective state office shall file the statement of intention online or electronically with the SOS.
- 3) Requires, specified individuals who have to report activity expenses, when sending any written or printed invitation to an elected state officer, candidate for elective state office, legislative official, or agency official, to include on the invitation or on a letter attached to the invitation a printed or handwritten statement that is at least as large and readable as 8-point Roman boldface type, in a color or print that contrasts with the background so as to be easily legible. The statement shall read:

“Attendance at this event by a public official will constitute acceptance of a reportable gift.”

This bill:

- 1) Allows the FPPC to include a nonclerical position in a class in the civil service classification plan that is separate and distinct from any other position of any other department or agency.

- 2) Expands the state offices for which candidates must file their statement of intention online or electronically with the SOS to include judicial offices.
- 3) Increases the font size on required statements, described in 3) of existing law, to 10-point Roman boldface type.
- 4) Makes technical changes.

### **BACKGROUND**

Political Reform Act. Proposition 9, which appeared on the June 1974 ballot, created the Political Reform Act (PRA) and established California's campaign finance and disclosure laws for state and local campaigns, candidates, officeholders, and ballot measures. Prop 9 created the FPPC to implement, administer, and enforce the PRA.

Under the PRA individuals who intend to be candidates for elective state office must file a statement of intention, Form 501, online or electronically with the SOS. Under the PRA, an "elective state office" includes office of Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Insurance Commissioner, Controller, SOS, Treasurer, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Member of the Legislature, member elected to the Board of Administration of the Public Employees' Retirement System, member elected to the Teachers' Retirement Board, and member of the State Board of Equalization. Separately, all candidates, and elected officers and their controlled committees, as specified, must file campaign statements with the SOS.

Cal-Access Replacement System or CARS. In 2000, the SOS deployed, pursuant to SB 49 (Karnette), Chapter 866, Statutes of 1997, a system called the California Automated Lobby Activity and Campaign Contribution and Expenditure Search System, or Cal-Access. Cal-Access replaced the paper-based system and provides on-line filing of reports and statements required by the PRA. It also provides on-line access to these statements and reports for the public.

Cal-Access is now 26 years old, and the SOS reports that components of the system are no longer supported by its vendor. As a result, the system has periodically crashed and denied public access. Additionally, the SOS has indicated that the ability to make modifications to Cal-Access is very limited.

SB 1349 (Hertzberg), Chapter 845, Statutes of 2016, directed the SOS, in consultation with the FPPC, to replace Cal-Access with a new disclosure system, the Cal-Access Replacement System or CARS. The SOS does not expect to fully deploy CARS until late 2026 at the earliest.

### **COMMENTS**

- 1) Committee Bill. This bill is one of the Senate Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments' committee bills. This bill contains changes requested by the FPPC and by committee staff.

- 2) Personnel Classification Plan. The California Personnel Classification Plan, which is administered by CALHR and the State Personnel Board, is a framework that groups state civil service positions into classes. The allocation of the position into a class is based on the duties and responsibilities of the position. Positions are included in the same class if the positions are sufficiently similar so the duties and responsibilities can use the same descriptive title, the positions have the same requirements for education, experience, knowledge, and the current position holder has the ability to perform the duties, the positions require the same tests of fitness, and the same schedule of compensation can be made to apply with equity.

According to the FPPC, current law prevents them from using any statewide classifications for nonclerical positions. The proposed language would give the FPPC the option to use statewide classifications that align with the duties and responsibilities of FPPC specific positions, to support a more efficient hiring process and cost-effective exam administration.

Most of the FPPC's positions can be standardized with other positions in the state classification system, but some specialized positions, such as Political Reform Consultant II, require flexibility allowing the FPPC to mandate knowledge and expertise of the PRA for that position.

- 3) Same Code Section? The PRA includes various sections that exist in multiple versions with the same code section number. The existence of multiple versions of the code with the same code section number reflects a technical mechanism to allow certain changes to state law to go into effect when CARS is deployed.

In anticipation of the deployment of CARS, SB 1239 (Hertzberg), Chapter 662, Statutes of 2018, made numerous substantive and technical changes to provisions of the PRA governing the filing of campaign and lobbying reports. As CARS was in development at the time, SB 1239 made changes that were incorporated into the design of CARS but specified those changes would not go into effect until the SOS certified that CARS was functional and met the requirements of state law. Additionally, SB 459 (Allen), Chapter 873, Statutes of 2022, created new provision going into effect a year after the SOS certifies CARS. As a result, various provisions of the PRA exist: one version is operative now, a second version becoming operative when the SOS certifies that CARS meets specified requirements of state law (at which point, the currently operative version of the section will become inoperative), and a third version becoming operative one year after CARS is certified.

AB 808 (Addis), Chapter 278, Statutes of 2025, made changes to the provisions that would be operative once the SOS certifies CARS, not the provisions that would be operative a year after the SOS certifies CARS. This bill amends the provision a year after CARS is certified to have it not override changes made by AB 808.

- 4) Current Form 501. Under the PRA, judicial candidates are not included in the definition of an "elective state officer." Therefore, no statute requires judicial candidates to file their Form 501 with the SOS. Judicial candidates, however, are required to file campaign reports with the SOS. Currently, judicial candidates file with the SOS, as the Form 501 mandates every candidate to do so. This bill would

make it explicit in statute that judicial candidates must file their Form 501 with the SOS.

**RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION**

AB 808 (Addis), Chapter 278, Statutes of 2025, eliminated the option to file various campaign reports via facsimile and updated terms used in state law to reflect the electronic filing of required campaign-related reports.

SB 459 (Allen), Chapter 873, Statutes of 2022, required lobbying entities to disclose additional information on lobbying reports, as specified, and increases the frequency of reporting if certain conditions are met. The provisions of this bill become operative one year after the date the SOS certifies CARS.

SB 1239 (Hertzberg), Chapter 662, Statutes of 2018, made numerous substantive and technical changes related to the procedures associated with filing campaign and lobbying reports through CARS.

SB 1349 (Hertzberg), Chapter 845, Statutes of 2016, requires the SOS, in consultation with the FPPC, to develop CARS.

**POSITIONS**

**Sponsor:** Author

**Support:** None received

**Oppose:** None received

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