



ASSEMBLY MEMBER

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DISTRICT 22



AB 1135: Voter Signature Requirements

PURPOSE

AB 1135 increases the likelihood that legitimate vote-by-mail (VBM) ballots are counted by allowing county registrars to compare a voter's ballot envelope signature to other official documents in the voter's record, so long as those signatures directly or indirectly compare to the voter's original affidavit of registration.

EXISTING LAW

Currently, a voter's ballot signature can only be compared directly to the signature on that voter's current affidavit of registration.

BACKGROUND

The 2012 November election was the first general election in California where more voters voted by mail than in person. Since 1980, the percent of votes cast by mail in general elections has increased from about 6% to just over 50%. Because voting by mail is quickly becoming the preferred voting method, it is important for VBM voters have the best possible chance of having their ballots count.

Last November, nearly 60,000 vote-by-mail ballots were rejected, with about one-third rejected because signatures on vote-by-mail envelopes did not match the signatures on the voters' original affidavits of registration. These rejections are particularly noteworthy because California has the highest absentee ballot rejection rate of any state in the country.

PROBLEM

One major problem with the signature verification system is that it doesn't account for changes in signatures over time. For example, a young voter who registers to vote at 17 may not

have a permanent signature. Similarly, elderly voters' signatures often change with age. These individuals' ballots are in danger of being thrown out because of the strict signature verification rules in current code.

SOLUTION

The registrar of voters issues other relevant documents from voters containing updated signatures. Examples include address verifications, absentee ballot requests and verified ballots themselves. With these updated signatures on record and readily accessible, registrars can more easily verify a voter's signature on his or her VBM ballot. AB 1135 helps county registrars ensure VBM voters have the greatest chance of having their votes count and minimizes voter disenfranchisement.

SUPPORT

California Association of Clerk & Elections
Officials (CACEO)
California Common Cause
California Forward Action Fund
California Secretary of State

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