



ASSEMBLY MEMBER

Kevin Mullin

DISTRICT 22



AB 2028: Vote-by-Mail Pilot Project Expansion

PURPOSE

AB 2028 proposes a modest expansion to the pilot project that is already taking place in Yolo County. The purpose of the project is to examine the effect of all-mail elections on voter turnout, including an analysis of turnout by ethnicity.

EXISTING LAW

In 2011 the legislature authorized a pilot project to examine the effects of vote-by-mail elections on turnout levels in special elections. The project only applied to one rural county, and it capped the number of mail-in elections at three; it is set to expire in 2018. Last year, elections were conducted on one out of the three total permissible election dates.

BACKGROUND & PROBLEM

In recent years, the percentage of California voters who cast mail-in ballots has increased dramatically, and it is especially great in special elections. Last year more than 80% of voters cast their ballots by mail in some cases. At the same time, these special elections see abysmal turnout levels, at times dipping below 10% of eligible voters.

Research from the University of California San Diego indicates that when special elections are conducted by mail, turnout levels increase by close to eight percentage points in California. An increase of this magnitude could mean nearly doubling turnout rates in some jurisdictions. In addition, the policy has the potential to save taxpayer dollars because mail-ballot elections typically cost much less than traditional polling place elections.

An election report that analyzed the first elections in the pilot project demonstrated no significant increase or decrease in turnout, even when turnout levels were broken down by ethnicity. The report did, however, indicate a total cost-savings of about 43%. In the end, it called for more data on all-mail elections in California.

Because there are only two permissible all-mail special election dates left under the pilot, the legislature should expand the program to gather more data. In doing so, an urban county should be included to contrast the rural county that is already part of the program. San Mateo County is a great candidate: it is an urban county and, as a charter county, it already conducts some special elections by mail, so an all-mail infrastructure is already in place. By adding San Mateo County to the pilot, AB 2028 proposes a modest program expansion.

SOLUTION

AB 2028 expands the current pilot project in an effort to capture more data on the effects of vote-by-mail on turnout by including an urban county, San Mateo, in the pilot program.

SUPPORT

San Mateo County
Urban County Caucus
California State Association of Counties
California Assn. of Clerks & Elections Officials

STAFF CONTACT

Hana Joy
State Capitol, Room 3160
hana.joy@asm.ca.gov
Ph. 916.319.2022 | Fx: 916.319.2122