



ASSEMBLY MEMBER

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DISTRICT 22

AB 477: Making Eligible Ballots Count



PURPOSE

AB 477 will reduce the number of legitimate vote-by-mail ballots that are rejected, ensuring that fewer voters are disenfranchised. To do this, it makes several key changes. First, it permits elections officials to use a “ballot cure” form to collect signatures for ballot envelopes that arrive at the county elections office without a signature. Second, it grants county elections officials additional time (up to eight days after the election) to collect signatures for unsigned ballot envelopes. And finally, it accounts for changing voter signatures over time by allowing elections officials to compare the signature on vote-by-mail ballot envelopes to other signatures in a voter’s official registration file.

NOTE: The bill also contains technical and non-controversial amendments for the Green Party, which will facilitate their primary election process.

BACKGROUND & PROBLEM

California has one of the highest ballot rejection rates in the country, which is especially disconcerting because vote-by-mail ballot use has increased rapidly in recent years, with 60 percent of voters casting their ballots by mail in last November’s general election. With such high usage rates, it is imperative the state do everything possible to minimize the number of discarded legitimate ballots.

69,000 ballots were rejected in the 2012 general election. About one-quarter of vote-by-mail ballots were thrown out because the signature on the ballot envelope did not match the signature on record. With the advent of online voter registration, many voters’ signatures are pulled from their Department of Motor Vehicles file. In many cases, this signature is out of date or the

voter was unable to sign clearly because they used an electronic signature pad. AB 477 would reduce the number of ballots thrown out because of mismatching signatures by allowing elections officials to use other signatures in a voter’s registration record to verify vote-by-mail envelopes.

In addition, about 17 percent of ballots are not counted because the voter failed to sign his or her ballot envelope altogether. To remedy this, AB 477 allows elections officials to collect a voter’s signature on a separate form, signed under penalty of perjury. This policy has been successfully implemented in both Florida and Colorado. Lastly, the bill also incorporates another successful Colorado law by allowing elections officials to collect signatures on unsigned ballots for up to eight days after an election.

SUMMARY

AB 477 will reduce the number of legitimate vote-by-mail ballots that are rejected in California. With 60 percent of voters casting their ballots by mail it is critical we ensure legitimate ballots are counted and voters are not disenfranchised.

SUPPORT

California Voter Foundation
California Assn. of Clerks and Elections Officials
California Forward
Common Cause
Green Party
League of Women Voters
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
Secretary of State, Alex Padilla
VerifiedVoting.org

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