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THIRD READING

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Bill No: SB 431  
Author: McGuire (D)  
Introduced: 2/21/19  
Vote: 21

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SENATE ELECTIONS & C.A. COMMITTEE: 4-1, 4/23/19  
AYES: Umberg, Hertzberg, Leyva, Stern  
NOES: Nielsen

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**SUBJECT:** Elections: voter registration forms

**SOURCE:** Author

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**DIGEST:** This bill requires the Secretary of State (SOS) to provide additional voter registration forms to a school, free of charge, within 30 days of a receiving a request.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law:

- 1) Provides that a person is entitled to register to vote who is a United States citizen, a resident of California, not imprisoned or on parole for the conviction of a felony, and at least 18 years of age at the time of the next election.
- 2) Permits a person who is at least 16 years old and otherwise meets all voter eligibility requirements to preregister to vote. Provides that the person's voter registration will be deemed effective as soon as the person is 18 years old at the time of the next election.
- 3) Requires the SOS to annually provide every high school, California Community College (CCC), and California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) campus with voter registration forms.

- 4) Requires that additional voter registration forms be provided to a school, free of charge, if requested by the school.
- 5) Declares that it is the intent of the Legislature that every eligible high school and college student receive a meaningful opportunity to apply to register to vote. It is also the intent of the Legislature that every school do all in its power to ensure that students are provided the opportunity and means to apply to register to vote.

This bill:

- 1) Requires the SOS to provide additional voter registration forms to a school, free of charge, within 30 days of a receiving a request.
- 2) Makes technical, nonsubstantive changes.

## **Background**

*The Student Voter Registration Act of 2003.* Established by AB 593 (Ridley-Thomas, Chapter 819, Statutes of 2003), the Student Voter Registration Act of 2003, among other provisions, required the SOS to provide each high school, CCC, CSU, and UC with voter registration forms and information describing eligibility requirements and instructions on how to return the completed form.

In 2007, the Legislature passed and Governor Schwarzenegger signed SB 854 (Ridley-Thomas, Chapter 481, Statutes of 2007), which permitted college students to receive a voter registration application preprinted with relevant personal information through an automated program in coordination with the SOS during the class registration process. However, if an applicant chose to register to vote via class registration, a preprinted voter registration application was sent to the applicant. The applicant would need to be completed and returned in order to become registered to vote. This automated program launched in October 2009 and, in 2010, 10,330 students visited the site and filled out a voter registration form.

During the development of the automated program, the SOS continued to send out voter registration forms to all students. In their annual report to the Legislature on student voter registration, in 2008, the SOS indicated that over 2.5 million student voter registration applications were printed and mailed. The SOS only received 16,489, or 0.66 percent, completed registration applications.

In response to the dismal completion rate, the Legislature passed and Governor Brown signed AB 1446 (Mullin, Chapter 593, Statutes of 2014). SB 1446 allowed paper registration applications be sent in numbers specifically requested by campuses and encouraged students to register to vote through the online voter registration application. AB 1446 also updated the voter registration process at CSU and CCC campuses by requiring that an automated class registration system allow students to submit an affidavit of voter registration electronically on the SOS's website.

In 2016, the Legislature passed and Governor Brown signed AB 2455 (Chiu & Bonta, Chapter 417, Statutes of 2016). AB 2455, among other provisions, required the CSU and CCC, and requested the UC, to establish a process that permits the submission of an electronic voter registration affidavit when a student enrolls for school online.

*Recent Student Voter Registration Form Statistics.* Among other provisions of SB 1446, each year, the SOS contacts each high school, CCC, CSU, UC, and private university in California to assess their voter registration needs. According to the data in their 2018 annual report on student voter registration, 713 high schools requested 159,914 paper voter registration applications. For higher education campuses, a total of 47,775 paper voter registration applications were requested. As a result, the SOS distributed 207,689 voter registration applications to high schools, community colleges, CSU campuses, UC campuses, and private college campuses. Of the forms that were distributed, approximately 3.51 percent or 7,280 forms were completed and returned.

However, along with legislative efforts, the SOS has been encouraging students to register to vote via the online voter registration application. For 2018, an estimated 211,592 high school and college students successfully completed a preregistration and registration online application. This is a substantial increase from 2016 when 20,758 voter registration applications were completed online.

*Student Outreach Programs.* The SOS has created multiple voter outreach programs aimed at increasing student civic engagement and participation. For example, the last two weeks in April and September are known as High School Voter Education Weeks. In partnership with the California Department of Education and the SOS, these weeks provide opportunities to promote civic education and participation. Civic engagement activities can include registering/pre-registering voters, conducting a mock election, and holding a forum of candidates seeking office.

The SOS also partners with the Superintendent of Public Instruction to conduct the California Student Mock Election. This mock election invites schools throughout California to hold a mock election using races on the ballot in a regular election. For the 2018 Gubernatorial General Election, the mock election took place on October 9, 2018 with 477 schools participating and reporting results. The mock election ballot featured the races for Governor, United States Senator, and 11 ballot measures. In total, there were 208,119 ballots cast.

In 2018, the SOS also proposed a California University and College Ballot Bowl. In partnership with the UC, CSU, CCC, and the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities, the Ballot Bowl sought to encourage campuses to engage their student by registering them to vote. For each segment of higher education, campuses with the highest number of students registered to vote, the largest percentage of its student body registered to vote, or the most creative approach for registering students were all presented with awards. The overall winner of the inaugural California University and College Ballot Bowl was California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo. The campus registered 3,178 students to vote.

### **Comments**

- 1) According to the author, under the Student Voter Registration Act of 2003, the Secretary of State must provide every high school, community college, CSU, and UC campus with voter registration forms. Although the current administration has made great strides to provide valuable voter access to high schools, we must ensure that progress continues regardless of the administration.

Currently, California law does not specify a period of time that the Secretary of State's office must provide voter registration forms to educational institutions. Despite higher voter turnout in the 2018 general elections, we must continue to ensure that we engage our youth at the polls. SB 431 guarantees there is access for all high school and college students to acquire voter registration forms by requiring that these forms be sent within 30 days of their request by a school.

### **Related/Prior Legislation**

AB 2455 (Chiu and Bonta, Chapter 417, Statutes of 2016) required the CSU and CCC, and request the UC, to implement a process and the infrastructure to allow a

person who enrolls at the institution online to submit an affidavit of voter registration electronically.

AB 1446 (Mullin, Chapter 593, Statutes of 2014), among other provisions, allowed paper registration applications to be sent in numbers specifically requested by the campuses and encourages students to register to vote through the online voter registration application.

SB 854 (Ridley-Thomas, Chapter 481, Statutes of 2007), among other provisions, required every CCC and CSU campus to permit students through an automated program in coordination with the SOS, during the class registration process, to elect to receive a voter registration application preprinted with relevant personal information.

AB 593 (Ridley-Thomas, Chapter 819, Statutes of 2003) required the SOS to provide voter registration forms and information to students in all high schools, CCC, and campuses of the CSU or UC.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: No Local: No

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 4/23/19)

None received

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 4/23/19)

None received

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