
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1116 (Berman) - Elections: voter registration

Version: June 23, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: June 29, 2026

Policy Vote: E. & C.A. 4 - 1

Mandate: No

Consultant: Robert Ingenito

Bill Summary: AB 1116 would require the Secretary of State (SOS), by September 1, 2027, to develop a method to collect an electronic image of a signature from someone who does not have a California driver's license or a California identification card and is registering to vote electronically using the statewide voter registration system on the SOS's website.

Fiscal Impact: SOS indicates that it would incur a one-time cost of \$10 million, \$5 million annually thereafter, to implement the provisions of the bill (General Fund, see Staff Comments).

Background: California law requires individuals seeking to vote to register by providing identifying information that election officials use to verify eligibility and maintain accurate voter records. Registration information generally includes personal identifiers, such as a voter's name, address, date of birth, and other information used to confirm identity and eligibility.

In 2008, the Legislature authorized online voter registration for eligible Californians who possess a valid California driver's license or state identification card. The online registration system became operational upon certification that California's statewide voter registration database complied with federal requirements under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).

To ensure the integrity of online voter registration, applicants must provide information that can be electronically verified through records maintained by the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). SOS is required to confirm the applicant's identifying information with DMV records and obtain an electronic copy of the applicant's signature from the driver's license or state identification card. That signature is incorporated into the voter's registration record and serves as a key verification tool in election administration, including the signature-matching process used to authenticate vote-by-mail ballots, which are utilized by the vast majority of California voters.

Proposed Law: This bill would, effective September 1, 2027, do the following:

- Require SOS to develop a method to collect an electronic image of a signature for those without a driver's license or state identification card who are registering using the statewide online system.
- Direct SOS to amend its online registration affidavit to provide that a person providing their electronic signature assents to its use and that SOS accept the signature for voter registration purposes.

- Require SOS to develop a system for those who register without providing a driver's license or state identification card number that authenticates the identity of the applicant using the last four digits of their Social Security Number, date of birth, and full name.
- Require SOS to develop a process for transmitting the image of the signature collected by the online registration system to the statewide voter registration database and the county election management systems.

Related Legislation:

- SB 299 (Limon, 2024) would have required SOS and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to develop a process to determine whether a person who submits a driver's license application is already registered or preregistered to vote. Based upon this determination, DMV would have been required to transmit specified information to the SOS so the SOS could register, preregister, or update that person's existing voter registration. Governor Newsom vetoed this bill. In his veto message, he noted that it would have required DMV and SOS to develop new information technology systems for processing voter registrations and that these systems would cost tens of millions of dollars. The bill died on the Senate Floor.
- SB 381 (Ron Calderon, Chapter 613, Statutes of 2008), allows a person who is qualified to register to vote and who has a valid California driver's license or state identification card to submit an affidavit of voter registration electronically through the California's Online Voter Registration system on the SOS's internet website.

Staff Comments: As noted above, this bill would require SOS to modify California's online voter registration system to allow applicants who do not possess a California driver's license or state identification card to upload an electronic image of their signature. According to SOS, implementing this requirement would necessitate substantial changes to VoteCal and related voter registration systems, which currently rely on the electronic retrieval of signatures from government databases and were not designed to accept signature images submitted directly by the public.

Specifically, SOS indicates that implementation would require the development of new technological capabilities to receive, store, review, validate, and transmit uploaded signature images while maintaining the security and integrity of the state's voter registration infrastructure. In addition, the bill does not establish the technical or operational standards necessary to administer such a system, including requirements related to image quality, file formats, validation procedures, storage, security protocols, or the handling of incomplete submissions. As a result, SOS would need to develop these standards and potentially procure additional software or technology solutions to support implementation.

SOS initially estimated that the bill would result in one-time costs of \$1 million to modify VoteCal and related voter registration systems to support the collection and processing of electronic signature images. However, SOS now anticipates significant additional costs for third-party software, cybersecurity protections, image validation tools, storage

requirements, and ongoing workload associated with reviewing and processing submitted signature images.

The bill also would create ongoing operational costs related to customer support, signature image validation, exception processing, and coordination with county elections officials.

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