
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 1116
Author: Berman (D), et al.
Amended: 8/13/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE ELECTIONS & C.A. COMMITTEE: 4-1, 6/16/26
AYES: Wiener, Allen, Cervantes, Umberg
NOES: Choi

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 5-2, 8/13/26
AYES: Cervantes, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NOES: Seyarto, Dahle

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 60-18, 6/3/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Elections: voter registration

SOURCE: Center for Secure and Modern Elections

DIGEST: This bill requires by January 1, 2029, the Secretary of State (SOS) 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' website.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Entitles a person to register to vote if that person is a United States citizen, a resident of California, not in prison for the conviction of a felony, not found mentally incompetent to vote by a court, and at least 18 years of age at the time of the next election.

- 2) Permits a person who is qualified to vote and who has a valid California driver's license or state identification card to submit an affidavit of voter registration electronically on the SOS' website. On the affidavit, the person registering to vote must affirmatively attest to the truth of the information provided and also assent to the use of the applicant's signature from their driver's license or identification card for verification of voter identity.
- 3) Requires the SOS to obtain an electronic copy of the signature from the person's driver's license or state identification card directly from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).
- 4) Requires the SOS' electronic voter registration system to immediately verify that the driver's license or state identification card number provided and the date of birth provided matches the information on file for the person at the DMV.
- 5) Requires the SOS and the DMV to maintain a process and infrastructure to transfer the electronic copy of the signature and other information for the person registering to the SOS and county election management systems so that the person may register to vote and vote.
- 6) Provides that in order to register on the SOS' website without a California driver's license or a state identification card, a person must complete the affidavit of voter registration electronically on the SOS' website, print a hard copy of the completed affidavit, and mail or deliver the hard copy of the completed affidavit to the SOS or a county elections official. A person who registers to vote this way must, when first voting, provide documentation of identity.
- 7) Uses a person's signature on the return envelope for a vote by mail (VBM) ballot to verify the identity of the voter.
- 8) Requires each state, pursuant to the federal Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), to implement a single, uniform, official, centralized, interactive computerized statewide voter registration list defined, maintained, and administered at the state level that contains the name and registration information of every legally registered voter in the state and assigns a unique identifier to each legally registered voter in the state. California's statewide voter database is known as VoteCal.

This bill:

- 1) Requires the 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 to vote using the statewide online system.
- 2) Permits the SOS to prescribe technical, security, accessibility quality, retention, and transmission standards necessary to implement the method of collecting and sharing electronic images of signatures.
- 3) Requires the SOS to develop a system for those who register without providing a driver's license or state identification card number that verifies the last four digits of a registrant's Social Security Number, full name, and date of birth using the same federal and state verification process as is currently used for affidavits of registration submitted on paper that rely the applicant's Social Security Number for identity verification. The bill specifically expresses that this new verification process does not require a new interface with the Social Security Administration.
- 4) Directs the SOS to amend its online registration affidavit to provide that a person providing their electronic signature assents to its use and that the SOS accept the signature for voter registration purposes.
- 5) Requires the 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.
- 6) Takes effect on January 1, 2029.

Background

California has long mandated that a voter register to vote by filing an affidavit of registration. Among other information, the affidavit shall include the name, residence address, date of birth, driver's license number, and last four digits of the social security number of the person registering to vote. Election officials use this information to confirm the person is eligible to register and later to verify the voter's identity.

SB 381 (Ron Calderon, Chapter 613, Statutes of 2008) permitted filing an affidavit of registration online on the SOS' website by any person who is qualified to register to vote and who has a valid California driver's license or state identification card. SB 381 made the online voter registration system operative

when the SOS certified that its statewide voter registration database complied with the requirements of HAVA.

For security purposes, SB 381 required the person registering to vote on the SOS' website to provide their driver's license or identification card number, date of birth, the last four digits of their social security number, and any other information the SOS deems necessary to establish the identity of the affiant. The law requires the SOS to immediately confirm with the DMV that the driver's license or state identification card number and date of birth match the information on file with the DMV and to obtain an electronic copy of the applicant's signature from the driver's license or state identification card. That signature becomes part of the voter's file with the elections official in the county where the voter resides and gets compared to the signature on the VBM ballot envelope when the voter votes by mail, as over 80% of California voters do.

Comments

- 1) *Author's Statement.* The National Voter Registration Act and California's New Motor Voter program have been instrumental in closing voter registration gaps by making it easier for eligible voters to register or update their registration when completing a driver's license and state identification card transaction. Similarly, our online voter registration system has simplified voter registration for Californians with a DMV-issued driver's license or identification card. Nevertheless, there remains a voter registration gap of over four million Californians. This bill would take the next step to assist eligible but unregistered Californians by removing an unnecessary barrier to using our online voter registration system. This change will make our voter registration process more cost-effective and efficient, while maintaining the integrity of our voter lists.
- 2) *Secretary of State Concerns.* Calling the bill fundamentally flawed, Secretary of State Shirley Weber writes this bill "presents severe technical, security, and operational challenges that make implementation not only impractical but potentially dangerous to the integrity of California's election systems." She enumerates her concerns as follows:

Security risks. The SOS states, "Our current VoteCal system software deliberately restricts external connections to trusted government partners like the California [DMV] precisely to maintain the highest level of security." Using any outside vendor to achieve the mandates of this bill could compromise critical protections of the SOS's online systems.

Technical and operational complexity. The SOS notes the VoteCal system was not designed to accept or validate signature files from the public and so substantial modifications to the system would be necessary to not only the SOS's systems but also to the 58 county election management systems.

Identity verification gaps. The bill directs SOS to verify an applicant registration using information from the federal Social Security Administration (SSA), but the SOS points out this is not currently possible as the SOS does not contract with the SSA but relies on DMV for identity verification. This adds a complication to implementing the bill and also an expense.

Prohibitive implementation timeline and costs. California has nearly 23 million registered voters. The SOS notes that initial implementation of online voter registration in 2012 cost \$1.8 million and this modification would be of a similar scale. The SOS emphasizes the differences between California's voter registration system and that of other states cannot be overstated, thus rendering other state's costs for similar activities incomparable.

Related/Prior Legislation

SB 299 (Limon) of 2024 would have required the SOS and the 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 the DMV and SOS to develop new information technology systems for processing voter registrations and that these systems would cost tens of millions of dollars.

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' internet website.

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

According to the Senate Committee on Appropriations:

Costs to SOS could potentially reach the low millions of dollars annually (General Fund).

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/13/26)

Center for Secure and Modern Elections (source)
Coalition of Orange County Community Health Centers
Disability Rights California
Health in Partnership
Institute for Responsive Government Action
League of Women Voters of California
NextGen California
Responsive Gov Action

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/13/26)

County of Kern

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: Noting that many Californians, particularly those with disabilities, do not possess driver's licenses or state identification cards, supporters fault the current online registration system for creating barriers to participation. For hundreds of thousands of people, the current system requires printing out, signing, and mailing or delivering in person to the county elections office the affidavit of registration. Once received, these paper forms create extra work for registrars of voters as they must decipher handwriting, scan signatures, and re-type handwritten forms into the registration database.

The bill's sponsor, the Center for Secure and Modern Elections, says of the changes the bill makes to online registration:

This change improves convenience for voters and saves time and money for election officials. It also improves the accuracy of voter records by reducing the possibility of inadvertent errors when handwritten forms are manually entered into the voter registration database. Expanding [online voter registration] also improves security, reducing the risk of a paper submission being lost or damaged in transit.

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 60-18, 6/3/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Petrie-

Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Valencia, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NOES: Alanis, Castillo, Chen, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Hoover, Lackey, Macedo, Patterson, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis

NO VOTE RECORDED: Flora

Prepared by: Carrie Cornwell / E. & C.A. / (916) 651-4106
8/17/26 10:34:22

**** END ****