
**SENATE COMMITTEE ON
ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS**
Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	AB 1249	Hearing Date:	7/15/25
Author:	Wilson		
Version:	5/29/25		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	Yes
Consultant:	Scott Matsumoto		

Subject: Early voting: satellite locations.

DIGEST

This bill requires a county that does not conduct their elections using the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) to provide at least one early voting location.

ANALYSIS

Existing law:

- 1) Permits any voter using a vote by mail (VBM) ballot, prior to the close of the polls on Election Day, to vote the ballot at the office of the elections official. An elections official's office may include satellite locations. A notice of satellite locations must be made by the elections official through a general news release, issued not later than 14 days prior to voting at the satellite location. If there is a declared emergency or disaster in the county, the notice must be made not later than 48 hours prior to voting at the satellite location.
- 2) Requires a VBM ballot voted at a satellite location to be placed in a VBM voter identification envelope to be completed by the voter.
- 3) Allows a voter to return their VBM ballot in-person at the polling place designated for the voter's home precinct or at a vote center without placing the ballot into a ballot identification envelope, if certain conditions are met.
- 4) Authorizes any county, pursuant to the VCA, to conduct elections in which every registered voter is mailed a ballot with vote centers and ballot drop-off locations available prior to and on Election Day, instead of operating polling places for the election. The VCA also requires a number of planning and outreach requirements for counties adopting and conducting.

This bill:

- 1) Specifies the ability for any voter to vote their VBM ballot at their elections official's office or satellite location beginning 29 days before Election Day.

- 2) Requires a county that does not conduct its elections using the VCA to provide at least one early voting location on the Saturday before Election Day. This location must be open for at least six hours.
- 3) Requires county election officials to do the following at their elections offices, satellite locations, and early voting locations:
 - a) Provide at least one voting unit for voters with disabilities that is certified or conditionally certified by the Secretary of State (SOS).
 - b) Permit a voter to vote their VBM ballot without placing it in a VBM envelope.
 - c) Provide notice of satellite locations not later than two weeks before voting may occur at the satellite location.
- 4) Requires election officials to permit voters to do the following at early voting locations:
 - a) Return the voter's VBM ballot without placing it in a VBM envelope.
 - b) Register to vote, update a voter registration, and vote.
 - c) Receive and vote a provisional ballot.
 - d) Receive a replacement ballot.
 - e) Vote a regular, provisional, or replacement ballot using an accessible voting machine or equipment.
- 5) Repeals a provision that permits the office of an elections official from being considered a satellite location.
- 6) Repeals provisions that require a VBM ballot voted at a satellite location to be placed in a VBM ballot identification envelope. A voter may vote their VBM ballot, without the identification envelope, in person at the office of the elections official, a satellite location, polling place, or a vote center if certain conditions are met.

BACKGROUND

Voter's Choice Act. SB 450 (Allen), Chapter 832, Statutes of 2016, enacted the VCA and provided an additional model for counties to administer elections. This election model provides every registered voter a VBM ballot and allows a voter to visit any voting location, known as vote centers, within the voter's county prior to and on Election Day to vote or seek assistance with voting.

As part of the VCA, for regularly scheduled elections, one vote center is required for every 50,000 registered voters and needs to be open from the 10th day to the 4th day prior to the election. One vote center needs to be open for every 10,000 registered voters from the 3rd day prior to the election through Election Day. A minimum of two vote centers are required in jurisdictions with a population below 50,000 and 10,000,

respectively. For special elections, one vote center is required for every 60,000 registered voters from the 10th day to the day prior to the election, and one vote center for every 30,000 registered voters on Election Day.

Voters may visit any vote center in the voter's county to return a VBM ballot, register to vote, and vote. Vote centers also need to be accessible to voters with disabilities and provide language assistance in a way consistent with current state and federal law. Finally, SB 450 required a ballot drop-off location for every 15,000 registered voters and available from the 28th day before the election through Election Day.

Following the enactment of SB 450, five counties elected to change their election model to the VCA for the 2018 elections. In 2020, 10 counties made the switch and in 2022, 12 more counties opted to conduct their elections using the VCA model. For the November 2024 statewide presidential general election, 29 counties conducted their elections using the VCA model. For upcoming elections, Imperial County has indicated it will also use the VCA model.

Early Voting Statistics at Vote Centers. As previously mentioned, VCA counties are required to provide early voting options for voters. Below is a chart using data provided by the SOS on the number of in-person voters in VCA counties who voted a regular ballot, voted a provisional ballot, or used conditional voter registration (e.g. same-day registration). It should be noted that the total number of voters vary by election year because different numbers of counties used the VCA model in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

In-Person Voters in VCA Counties (Regular, Provisional, Conditional Voter Registration)							
	2020 Primary	2020 General	2021 Recall	2022 Primary	2022 General	2024 Primary	2024 General
E-4 (Friday)	15,147	173,212	18,442	4,712	12,684	6,508	48,316
E-3 (Saturday)	48,118	113,570	38,487	13,783	37,002	21,882	145,833
E-2 (Sunday)	51,018	108,760	34,190	16,656	45,372	23,658	134,368
E-1 (Monday)	75,187	235,032	105,476	42,144	103,566	64,346	305,016
Election Day*	1,130,332	658,469	407,745	398,684	835,761	554,895	1,590,410

*Includes votes recorded on or after Election Day. Even though these votes are cast on Election Day, it may be recorded by election officials on a subsequent day.

Non-VCA Counties. With Imperial County planning on using the VCA model for future elections, there will be 28 counties conducting their elections using the traditional polling place model or an all-VBM model. This includes Alpine, Colusa, Contra Costa, Del Norte, Glenn, Inyo, Kern, Lake, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Plumas, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Solano, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tulare, and Yuba counties. Of the 28 counties, Alpine and Sierra counties conduct their elections solely by mail. The remaining 26 counties use polling places where there are polling locations for every

1,000 voters or, if consolidated precincts are used, one polling location for up to 6,000 voters.

While there is not a requirement to provide early voting opportunities to voters in non-VCA counties, all counties generally provide an in-person voting opportunity at their elections office before Election Day. For example, according to data from the SOS's website, for the 2024 presidential general election, Contra Costa County had six early voting locations, including the county elections official's office in Martinez. The elections office was open on weekdays from October 7 to November 4 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The office was also open on Saturday, November 2, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The other five locations were open November 1 and November 4 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and open Saturday, November 2, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

COMMENTS

- 1) Author's Statement. This bill seeks to address the gap for early voting opportunities between VCA counties and non-VCA counties by ensuring that voters in non-VCA counties have access to at least one early voting location on the Saturday before statewide elections. This bill will provide critical flexibility for those who may face challenges on Election Day due to work, childcare, transportation, or other barriers. Its passage would help increase voter participation and ensure that every Californian has equal access to voting.
- 2) Polling from the Institute of Governmental Studies. On July 1, 2025, the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley, released the results of a poll about early voting and vote centers. The poll surveyed 6,474 registered voters in California, including 856 voters who voted in person. While 48 percent of in-person voters said they prefer to vote on Election Day, 46 percent preferred early voting options. One of the questions asked, "When you vote at an in-person voting site, what time of day do you prefer to vote?" Of the in-person respondents, 86 percent said on a weekday (14 percent before 9 a.m., 44 percent between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., and 28 percent after 5 p.m.) and 14 percent said on the weekend.
- 3) Why Saturday? This bill requires county election officials to provide an early voting location on the Saturday before Election Day in non-VCA counties. The author contends that having a Saturday option for voting provides needed flexibility who may find it challenging to vote during the week.

As noted previously, the IGS poll signals that there is a greater desire for voting options during the week than on the weekend. The SOS data on early in-person voting in VCA counties affirms the IGS polling data. With 29 counties representing over 75 percent of the state's electorate for elections in 2024, data on when a voter visits a vote center to vote could be a good indicator on what could happen in non-VCA counties. In-person voting on the day before Election Day (Monday) is substantially higher than any other early voting day. Monday's in-person totals is more than double Saturday's turnout in six of the last seven statewide elections. When looking at data for Sundays, it was comparable to Saturdays and had a higher turnout than Saturday in three of the last four statewide elections.

- 4) Early Voting Locations, Satellite Locations, and Election Offices. This bill uses various terminology, such as “office of the elections official,” “satellite location,” and “early voting location.” This bill also repeals language that explicitly permitted the office of the elections official to be a satellite location. Satellite locations could include a pop-up event or sending a Vote-Mobile to a particular location for a few hours. It is unclear whether the elections official’s office is considered a satellite location under the bill.

Election officials are also required to provide notice of any satellite location. It is also unclear whether the same notice requirement applies to the election’s office, if the satellite location is not the same as the elections office. The author should consider making clarifications to stem any potential confusion when implementing the bill’s requirements.

- 5) Only Statewide Elections? This bill requires at least one early voting location in non-VCA counties for statewide elections, but not for a standalone local election or special election. In these elections, an early voting location may be beneficial considering the time and distance a voter may have to travel to get to an elections office to vote early. Additionally, voters may eventually become accustomed to having early voting as an option, but see that the same option is unavailable depending on the type of election. The committee should consider whether the bill should be expanded to apply to any election.
- 6) Language Access. This bill requires early voting locations to have an accessible voting machine to allow voters with a disability access to voting. This bill is silent on language services provided at these early voting locations. On one hand, having language access increases voter access. On the other, it may be difficult to provide every required language at a single early voting location.
- 7) Effect on the VCA. One of the pillars and requirements of the VCA is early voting options for voters. By requiring non-VCA counties to have at least one early voting location, the bill would bring these counties one step closer to implementing VCA. This could potentially make it easier for counties to transition from a polling place county or an all-mail county to a VCA county. Alternatively, VCA counties may view this bill as a way to maintain services and opt to move from vote centers back to polling places.
- 8) Suggested Amendment – The Start of Early Voting. This bill specifies the ability for any voter to vote their VBM ballot at the office of the elections official or satellite location beginning 29 days before Election Day. Pursuant to AB 49 (Cervantes), Chapter 553, Statutes of 2019, county election officials are permitted to begin mailing VBM ballots earlier than the 29th day before Election Day. This could create a gap where a voter may have their VBM ballot before the 29th day before Election Day, want to vote in person at the elections office, and be unable to vote. Committee staff recommends replacing the phrase to “beginning 29 days before the day of the election” to “no later than 29 days before the day of the election.” This amendment would provide the flexibility and create a floor rather than establish a ceiling.

9) Arguments in Support. The SOS, the bill's sponsor, stated, in support:

...a significant disparity exists between VCA and non-VCA counties regarding early voting options. Voters in non-VCA counties face limited opportunities to cast their ballots before Election Day, creating barriers for those with work obligations, transportation challenges, or other conflicts.

[...]

These changes will significantly enhance voter convenience and accessibility while minimizing financial and logistical burdens on county election officials. Our democracy is strongest when all eligible voters can participate fully in the electoral process.

10) Arguments in Opposition. Election Integrity Project California, Inc. (EIPCa) submitted a letter in opposition to this bill. While EIPCa notes that establishing early voting locations is a good idea, this bill may negatively impact geographically large counties and cause concerns around when the public is notified about early voting locations. Specifically, EIPCa recommends the following amendments:

- a) The SOS evaluate qualifying counties for ease or difficulty of voter access, and assign a number of satellite locations deemed necessary by circumstances unique to them.
- b) Provide that early voting locations are determined so that all voters of the county are equally served with no consideration other than convenience and accessibility to the population of the county as a whole.
- c) Determine and publicize early voting locations in the same time and manner as polling locations.

RELATED/PRIOR LEGISLATION

AB 1411 (Sharp-Collins) of 2025 requires counties that do not conduct their elections using the VCA to design a voter education and outreach plan. The bill is being heard at today's hearing.

SB 450 (Allen), Chapter 832, Statutes of 2016, enacted the VCA and required that every registered voter is mailed a VBM ballot and may visit any voting location, known as vote centers, within the voter's county prior to and on Election Day to vote or seek assistance with voting.

PRIOR ACTION

Assembly Floor:	60 - 19
Assembly Appropriations Committee:	11 - 3
Assembly Elections Committee:	5 - 2

POSITIONS

Sponsor: California Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D.

Support: California Common Cause
California Voter Foundation
Disability Rights California
League of Women Voters of California

Oppose: Election Integrity Project California, Inc.

-- END --