
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 1249 (Wilson) - Early voting: satellite locations

Version: July 16, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 18, 2025

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

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Robert Ingenito

Bill Summary: AB 1249 would require a county that does not conduct its elections using the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) to provide at least one early voting location.

Fiscal Impact:

- By imposing new duties on local elections officials, this bill creates a state-mandated local program. To the extent the Commission on State Mandates determines that the provisions of this bill create a new program or impose a higher level of service on local agencies, local agencies could claim reimbursement of those costs. The magnitude is unknown, but potentially in excess of \$50,000 annually (General Fund, see Staff Comments).
- The Secretary of State (SOS) indicates that this bill would result in negligible costs.

Background: SB 450 (Allen, 2016) enacted the VCA and provided an additional model for counties to administer elections, providing every registered voter a vote-by-mail (VBM) ballot and allowing 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.

Under 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 county vote center 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 SB 450's enactment, five counties changed 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. A total of 28 counties will be conducting their elections using the traditional polling place model or an all-VBM model. Two of them, 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.

Proposed Law: This bill would do the following:

- Specify the ability for any voter to vote their VBM ballot at their elections official's office or satellite location no later than 29 days before Election Day.
- Require 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.
- Require county election officials to do the following at their elections offices, satellite locations, and early voting locations: (1) provide at least one voting unit for voters with disabilities that is certified or conditionally certified by SOS, (2) permit a voter to vote their VBM ballot without placing it in a VBM envelope, and (3) provide notice of satellite locations not later than two weeks before voting may occur at the satellite location.
- Require election officials to permit voters to do the following at early voting locations: (1) return the voter's VBM ballot without placing it in a VBM envelope, (2) register to vote, update a voter registration, and vote, (3) receive and vote a provisional ballot, (4) receive a replacement ballot, and (5) vote a regular, provisional, or replacement ballot using an accessible voting machine or equipment.
- Repeal a provision that permits the office of an elections official from being considered a satellite location.
- Repeal 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.

Related Legislation:

- AB 1411 (Sharp-Collins) would require counties that do not conduct their elections using the VCA to design a voter education and outreach plan. The bill is currently pending in this Committee.

- 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.

Staff Comments: This bill could result in costs in excess of \$50,000 per election across the 28 non-VCA counties, to open and staff an early voting location. The magnitude of costs ultimately would depend on the availability of existing personnel and physical infrastructure to support the day of early voting. For example, one county anticipates costs of up to \$5,000 per election, while another anticipates costs of \$30,000. Ultimately, any impacts to the General Fund would be subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

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