

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 1249 (Wilson)

As Amended July 16, 2025

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires a county that does not conduct their elections under the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) model to provide early voting on the Saturday before statewide elections, as specified.

Senate Amendments

Make a clarifying change.

COMMENTS

SB 450 (Allen), Chapter 832, Statutes of 2016, established the VCA and provided a new model for counties to administer elections. The VCA requires counties to mail a ballot to all active registered voters and replaced polling places with vote centers and ballot drop-off locations. For regularly scheduled elections, one vote center is required for every 50,000 registered voters open from the 10th day to the 4th day prior to the election, and one vote center for every 10,000 registered voters from the 3rd day prior to the election through Election Day, with no fewer than two vote centers. Voters can visit any vote center in the voter's county to return their ballot, register to vote, and vote. Vote centers are required to be accessible to voters with disabilities and provide language assistance in a way that is consistent with current state and federal law. Additionally, a VCA county is required to provide a ballot drop-off location for every 15,000 registered voters and make them available from the 28th day before the election through Election Day. For the November 5, 2024 statewide presidential general election, 29 counties conducted their elections using the VCA model.

While existing law does not expressly require a non-VCA county to offer early voting opportunities, in practice many provide early voting opportunities at their office or a satellite location. This bill requires a non-VCA county to provide at least one early voting location on the Saturday before a statewide election that is open for at least six hours, and requires the polling location to permit a voter to return their VBM ballot in person without the identification envelope.

The Senate amendments clarify that a voter may vote their VBM ballot at an elections official office or satellite location no later than 29 days before Election Day, instead of beginning 29 days before the election. This amendment ensures the bill aligns with existing law that permits a county elections official to begin mailing VBM ballots earlier than the 29th day before Election Day. This bill, as amended in the Senate, is consistent with prior Assembly actions.

According to the Author

"Currently, 29 of California's 58 counties offer voters the convenience of early voting through the Voter's Choice Act (VCA), while the remaining 29 counties do not. AB 1249 seeks to address this gap by ensuring that voters in non-VCA counties have access to at least one early voting location on the Saturday before statewide elections. This will provide critical flexibility for those who may face challenges on Election Day due to work, childcare, transportation, or other barriers. By passing this bill, we can help increase voter participation and ensure that every Californian has equal access to voting."

Arguments in Support

In support of a prior version of this bill, California Common Cause wrote: "Since the passage of SB 450 (Allen, 2016), VCA counties have demonstrated how expanded voting options—such as vote centers, early voting days, and more flexible VBM return methods—can improve accessibility and modernize elections. Yet, gaps remain between VCA and non-VCA counties. AB 1249 helps close those gaps, offering voters in all parts of the state more consistent and flexible options to participate in our democracy.

"By encouraging more early, in-person voter engagement and streamlining VBM ballot processing, AB 1249 also has the potential to ease election administration burdens and speed up vote counting on election night."

Arguments in Opposition

In opposition to a prior version of this bill, the Election Integrity Project California, Inc (EIPCa), wrote: "EIPCa's reservations regarding AB 1249 are two: 1) In counties of large area, or with challenging commute within the county due to geographical complexity, the addition of only one satellite may be insufficient. EIPCa recommends that qualifying counties under this statute be evaluated by the [Secretary of State (SOS)] for ease or difficulty of voter access, and assigned a number of satellites deemed necessary by circumstances unique to them.

"2) There is no legitimate reason for satellite 'pop-ups' that are not part of the original election plan. EIPCa believes that allowing pop-up satellites that have not been announced before the early voting 29 days begins opens the door for capricious, partisan placement decisions designed to benefit a single party or candidate rather than to benefit the county's voters as a whole.

Additionally, establishing pop-ups without full appropriate notice ensures that fewer voters (or only targeted voters) will be notified of the expanded voting opportunities."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- 1) 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).
- 2) The SOS indicates that this bill would result in negligible costs.

VOTES:**ASM ELECTIONS: 5-2-0**

YES: Pellerin, Bennett, Berman, Solache, Stefani

NO: Macedo, Tangipa

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-3-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

NO: Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 60-19-0

YES: 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

NO: Alanis, Castillo, Chen, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Hoover, Lackey, Macedo, Patterson, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis

UPDATED

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