

Date of Hearing: March 25, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS
Gail Pellerin, Chair
AB 1562 (Jackson) – As Amended February 11, 2026

SUBJECT: Elections: precinct board members.

SUMMARY: Authorizes a county elections official to adopt a system in which individuals are randomly selected to serve as precinct board members (also referred to as poll workers).

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Permits an elections official for each election to adopt a system in which individuals are randomly selected to serve as precinct board members.
- 2) Provides that every citizen who resides in the jurisdiction and is at least 18 years of age is eligible to be selected to serve as a precinct board member.
- 3) Prohibits an eligible person from being excluded from service as a precinct board member on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, ethnic group identification, age, mental disability, physical disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, or sexual orientation.
- 4) Allows an eligible person to be excused from service as a precinct board member for undue hardship upon themselves or the public.
- 5) Requires an elections official to assign the individuals selected to precincts within the jurisdiction in which the election will occur. Requires the assigned individuals to constitute the precinct board for that precinct.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Permits any voter, or any individual who possesses specified qualifications, to file an application with an elections official for the position of precinct board member. (Elections Code §12300)
- 2) Requires the persons appointed to serve as election officers for each precinct at any election to constitute the precinct board for that precinct. (Elections Code §12301)
- 3) Requires, except as provided below, that a member of a precinct board be a registered voter of the state. Permits a member to serve only in the precinct for which their appointment is received.
 - a) Allows an elections official, in order to provide for a greater awareness of the elections process, the rights and responsibilities of voters, and the importance of participating in the electoral process, as well as to provide additional members of precinct boards, to appoint not more than five pupils per precinct to serve as precinct board members. Permits a pupil to be appointed, notwithstanding their lack of eligibility to vote, subject to

the approval of the governing board of the educational institution in which the pupil is enrolled, if the pupil possesses the following qualifications:

- i) Is at least 16 years of age at the time of the election for which they are serving as a member of a precinct board.
- ii) Is a United States (US) citizen, will be a citizen at the time of the election for which they are serving as a member of a precinct board, or is lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the US.
- iii) Is a pupil in good standing attending a public or private secondary educational institution.
- iv) Is a pupil who has a grade point average of at least 2.5 on a 4.0 scale.

Prohibits a pupil appointed to a precinct board from tallying votes.

- b) Permits an elections official, in order to promote civic engagement among residents of the state and to provide additional members of precinct boards, to appoint not more than five nonvoters per precinct to serve as precinct board members. Provides that a nonvoter may be appointed, notwithstanding their lack of eligibility to vote, if the nonvoter possesses the following qualifications:

- i) Is lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the US.
- ii) Is otherwise eligible to register to vote except for their lack of US citizenship.

Prohibits a nonvoter appointed to a precinct board from serving as, or performing any of the duties of, the inspector of a precinct board, or tallying votes for the precinct board. (Elections Code §12302)

- 4) Requires elections officials to make reasonable efforts to recruit poll workers who are fluent in a language if three percent or more of the voting age residents in any precinct are fluent in that language and lack sufficient skill in English to vote without assistance. (Elections Code §12303)
- 5) Requires the Secretary of State (SOS) to appoint a task force of members who have experience in the administration of elections and other relevant backgrounds to study and recommend uniform guidelines for the training of precinct board members. Requires the SOS to adopt uniform standards for the training of precinct board members, based upon the recommendations of the task force appointed, as specified. (Elections Code §12309.5)
- 6) Requires each member of a precinct board to receive compensation from the governing body of the jurisdiction and requires this sum to be paid out of the treasury of the jurisdiction in which the election is held. (Elections Code §12310)

- 7) Allows a state employee to take time off, without loss of pay, to serve as a poll worker on Election Day, as specified. (Government Code §19844.7)
- 8) Provides that no person in the State of California shall, on the basis of sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, ethnic group identification, age, mental disability, physical disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, or sexual orientation, be unlawfully denied full and equal access to the benefits of, or be unlawfully subjected to discrimination under, any program or activity that is conducted, operated, or administered by the state or by any state agency, is funded directly by the state, or receives any financial assistance from the state. (Government Code §11135)

FISCAL EFFECT: The Legislative Counsel has keyed this bill non-fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of the Bill:** According to the author:

When people do not understand how democracy works, it becomes easier to manipulate and easier to break. When only a small group of people are running our elections, public trust begins to erode. AB 1562 strengthens our democracy and encourages civic engagement by authorizing county election officials to adopt a system in which individuals are randomly selected to serve as poll workers for elections. This bill is intended to bring more people closer to the democratic process, recognizing democracy works best when more people are inside the room, not locked out of it.

- 2) **Efforts to Diversify and Expand Precinct Board Members and Previous Legislation:** Over the decades, the Legislature has taken steps to expand and diversify the pool of precinct board members. AB 1856 (McPherson), Chapter 337, Statutes of 1996, authorized elections officials to appoint not more than two high school seniors to work in a polling place on election day, and AB 2671 (Salinas), Chapter 576, Statutes of 2006, deleted the restriction that a student must be a senior to work as a member of a precinct board.

AB 817 (Bonta), Chapter 162, Statutes of 2013, replicated the successful high school student poll worker program which a number of counties have used to bolster their poll worker recruitment and authorized county elections officials to appoint a person who is lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the US, and who is otherwise eligible to register to vote except for their lack of US citizenship, to serve as a precinct board member. Previous analysis stated that as the diversity of the state increases, new tools are needed to ensure that language assistance is available at the polling places and AB 817 addresses this need by expanding the pool of available bilingual speakers to serve as poll workers and other election volunteers.

AB 554 (Mullin), Chapter 150, Statutes of 2015, authorized an elections official to appoint a pupil, who is a lawful permanent resident of the US, to serve as a precinct board member, if the pupil otherwise possesses the qualifications required for a pupil to serve as a precinct board member. According to previous analysis, the intent of AB 554 was to provide for

additional precinct board members who are bilingual by allowing elections officials to appoint students who are legal permanent residents to serve as precinct board members.

- 3) **Other States:** According to information from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), in most states, poll workers must be qualified or registered voters. Generally, this means they are a US citizen, at least 18 years old, meet their state's residency requirements and have no criminal history that would prevent them from voting. Youth poll worker programs are an exception. In California, a US citizen, a legal permanent resident of the US who would be eligible to vote except for their citizenship status, and an eligible high school student may serve as poll workers.

A poll worker's job begins before Election Day, as many states require workers to attend training. Poll workers set up and close polling locations, help voters understand their rights, and protect ballots and voting equipment. Once the last voter has cast their ballot, workers must make sure every ballot that was distributed is accounted for.

According to NCSL, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington conduct elections mostly by mail and do not have specific requirements for poll workers in statute. Employees or volunteers are involved in processing mail ballots, but these states do not employ poll workers in the traditional sense.

- 4) **Nebraska:** According to NCSL, Nebraska is the only state that permits jurisdictions to "draft" poll workers in the same fashion as courts select jury members. According to Nebraska state law, a draftee poll worker is required to serve as a poll worker for two years in a county with a population less than 400,000 inhabitants, or four years in county with a population of 400,000 or more inhabitants. All draftee poll workers are randomly selected from the county's list of registered voters and are required to be of good repute and character and be able to read and write the English language, except as provided. Additionally, under Nebraska's law, no citizen is excluded from serving as a draftee poll worker unless excused by reason of ill health or other good and sufficient reason. A person who is selected and fails to serve can be found guilty of neglecting their duties.

Only two counties in the Nebraska avail themselves of this statutory authority: Douglas County and Sarpy County. According to the Douglas County Election Commission website, Douglas County serves more than 360,000 registered voters at approximately 230 precincts across the county and it takes up to 3,000 election workers to administer each election. More than fifty-percent of all election workers are volunteers and the Election Commission must draft voters to serve election duty in order to ensure elections are administered properly and fairly.

In Douglas County, if a person is age 70 or older, they may opt out of serving as a poll worker. Other individuals who are unable to fulfill their election duty for health or sufficient reasons are required to provide certain documentation to postpone or be excused altogether. A draftee who fails to serve at an election or attend training may be guilty of a misdemeanor and their name may be submitted to local law enforcement for citation.

- 5) **Lack of Details:** As currently written, this bill lacks sufficient detail regarding how a county elections official would implement a system to randomly select individuals to serve as poll workers. For example, it is unclear how elections officials would obtain a comprehensive list of US citizens residing in the county who are at least 18 years old. By comparison, Nebraska law relies on its registered voter file for random selection.

Additionally, while the bill allows individuals to be excused from poll worker service due to “undue hardship,” it does not define the criteria for what constitutes undue hardship or specify who is responsible for determining whether an individual meets that standard.

To address this, the author may wish to consider amending the bill to require the SOS to adopt regulations that provide clear guidance for the development and implementation of these poll worker draft programs.

- 6) **Arguments in Support:** In support of this bill, Power California Action writes:

At a time when voter confidence has declined and participation, especially among historically underrepresented communities, has dropped, California must take proactive steps to strengthen civic engagement and trust in our democratic institutions. AB 1562 provides a meaningful opportunity to do just that. By expanding how poll workers are recruited, this bill creates more pathways for Californians, particularly young people and communities of color, to engage directly in the electoral process. Increased exposure to how elections function can deepen civic understanding, build trust, and encourage life-long participation.

Power California Action believes building a diverse democracy requires intentional efforts to bring more people into the process, not just as voters, but as active participants. AB 1562 moves California in that direction.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Power California Action

Opposition

None on file.

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