

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 2281 (Berman)
As Introduced February 19, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes the Office of Elections Cybersecurity (OEC) within the Secretary of State's (SOS) Office to consult with academic researchers to develop best practices for protecting against threats to election cybersecurity. Requires the SOS to assess whether additional state resources are needed to replace election cybersecurity resources previously provided by the federal government.

Major Provisions

COMMENTS

AB 3075 (Berman), Chapter 241, Statutes of 2018, established the OEC within the SOS's office. The OEC has two primary missions. First, it is responsible for coordinating efforts between the SOS and local elections officials to reduce the likelihood and severity of cyber incidents that could interfere with the security or integrity of elections in California. The OEC is also tasked with monitoring and counteracting false or misleading information regarding the electoral process that is published online or on other platforms that may suppress voter participation, cause confusion, or disrupt the ability to ensure a secure election. According to the OEC's website, the office serves California with the sole purpose of keeping every Californian's vote safe from online interference, especially the spread of mis- and disinformation.

In 2018, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) was established within the federal Department of Homeland Security to maintain public trust and confidence in United States election systems. Since CISA's creation, many state and local elections officials have relied on CISA's free and voluntary assistance, expertise, and resources—as well as its partnerships with other agencies—to help protect election systems. Last year, the federal government made considerable changes to federal election cybersecurity support, funding, and infrastructure, including cutting funds to two information sharing centers supported by CISA. In response, the non-profit organization that operates both centers announced temporarily transitioning to charging state and local governments for membership and providing fee-based services.

According to the Author

"Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has cut critical funding, coordination, and support that helped states guard against threats to our election systems. Given the loss of federal election cybersecurity infrastructure, AB 2281 would direct the OEC [to] assess if additional state resources are needed to ensure that California officials continue to have the information and tools necessary to defend our democracy from cyber-attacks. Additionally, this bill would strengthen OEC by authorizing them to consult with academic researchers, allowing them to utilize their expertise in support of OEC's mission."

Arguments in Support

In support of this bill, Public Citizen's Democracy Campaign, writes: "With highly regarded institutions across the state, such as the University of Southern California's Center for Inclusive Democracy and the Election Administration Research Center at University of California[] Berkley, California has significant election law and administrative resources to draw from. Additionally, according to US News and Word Reports, California has two of the top undergraduate computer science programs for cybersecurity in the country. These academic resources, and the people that constitute them, should be activated by the state government to stay current with our election cybersecurity systems and best practices. Cybersecurity threats to state elections abound...Despite a marked increase in cybersecurity threats, federal election cybersecurity aid and coordination has drastically shrunk under the current presidential administration...These decisions create serious risks for California's election systems. AB 2281 would attempt to identify how state resources can be used to fill these holes."

Arguments in Opposition

None received.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, minor and absorbable costs to the SOS.

VOTES**ASM ELECTIONS: 6-1-1**

YES: Pellerin, Bennett, Berman, Elhawary, Solache, Stefani

NO: Gallagher

ABS, ABST OR NV: Johnson

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 10-1-4

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

NO: Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Hoover, Dixon, Muratsuchi, Ta

UPDATED

VERSION: February 19, 2026

CONSULTANT: Nichole Becker / ELECTIONS / (916) 319-2094

FN: 0002458