

Date of Hearing: May 6, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2604 (Berman) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

Policy Committee: Elections

Vote: 6 - 2

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill requires the Secretary of State (SOS) implement one of two options to allow voters to access text-message-based ballot curing.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the SOS to either: (a) implement a system that allows voters to access text-message-based ballot curing or (b) make available to county registrars the resources necessary to implement systems that allow voters to access text-message-based ballot curing.
- 2) Requires the SOS make certain data related to the system available on the SOS's website, such as the median time between notification and curing for both text-message-based and traditional ballot curing.
- 3) Allows the SOS to combine the system with existing county and SOS ballot tracking systems for vote-by-mail (VBM) ballots.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

Costs in the millions of dollars to the SOS to implement a statewide text-message-based ballot curing system (General Fund (GF)). The SOS notes that this bill would require significant modifications to the statewide voter registration database system (VoteCal) and county Election Management Systems (EMS). Current ballot tracking infrastructure allows VoteCal to send data to the ballot tracking vendor, but does not allow the receipt of data in return. According to the SOS, requiring two-way transmission of voter information and signature images is outside the scope of the current contract and would necessitate a new or expanded procurement, and multiple county EMS vendors have also confirmed integration workload would be required on behalf of the county. The SOS notes that such changes cannot realistically be implemented by January 1, 2027, due to current workload associated with the 2026 statewide election.

The SOS has identified two potential options to build or procure technology capable of sending official text message notifications to affected voters and guiding those voters through a secure, identity-verified ballot cure process:

- 1) Under the first path, an in-house build, the SOS would design, develop, and maintain the system entirely with state staff, with costs of approximately \$5.2 million in the first year, \$3.4 million in the second and third year, and \$2.2 million in the fourth year and annually thereafter for 13 additional positions and initial staff resources to promulgate regulations.

- 2) Under the second path, a procured solution, the SOS would contract with an outside vendor to provide an existing commercial platform that can be configured for ballot curing, with costs of approximately \$6.2 million in the first year, \$3.8 million in the second year, and \$3.4 million in the third year and annually thereafter for the contract, seven additional positions, and initial staff resources to promulgate regulations.

Alternatively, if the SOS chooses to provide counties with the resources necessary to implement local systems, resultant costs to the SOS may be higher than if the SOS implements its own text-message-based ballot curing system, as each county will have different needs. It is unclear whether the SOS must provide direct financial payments to counties to develop their own systems or incur staff workload and contract costs to fulfill counties' requests (GF).

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of GF structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

#### COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

In response to my AB 1037 from 2023, several counties have chosen to offer voters mobile curing as a secure, effective, and voter-friendly option to correct a missing or non-matching signature. Unfortunately, far too many curable ballots are still not corrected. Accordingly, AB 2604 would simply provide for statewide adoption of mobile ballot curing, thereby making it more likely that eligible ballots are counted and less likely that voters are disenfranchised.

This bill is sponsored by Protect Democracy United and the California Voter Foundation.

- 2) **Ballot Curing.** As an increasing number of voters prefer to vote via VBM ballots, the Legislature has undertaken many efforts to modify the signature verification process to reduce the number of rejected VBM ballots due to incomplete or invalid ballot identification envelopes. SB 759 (McGuire), Chapter 446, Statutes of 2018, created a cure process for a voter whose signature on their VBM ballot identification envelope does not match the signature on file in the voter's registration record. And, SB 523 (McGuire), Chapter 568, Statutes of 2019, required a county to notify a voter whose signature is missing on a VBM ballot and aligns the cure process with that for mismatched signatures.

Under these processes, a voter may return the relevant corrective signature statement in person or by mail, fax, or email. AB 1037 (Berman), Chapter 673, Statutes of 2023, allows a voter to return a completed signature cure form by electronic means if such means are made available by the elections official. Some counties have implemented an electronic cure process that utilizes a text platform, also known as a text-message-based system or a text to cure system, whereby a voter signs a form through the screen of their phone or tablet and submits the form using a secure platform. For example, the Contra Costa County Registrar of Voters implemented a text-message-based cure process beginning in the 2024 primary election. For the 2025 statewide special election, approximately 29% of cured signatures were done through text and the registrar received feedback that the option was particularly appealing for younger voters who comprise the largest demographic in the county whose signatures require curing.

This bill requires the SOS to either: (a) implement a text-message-based ballot curing system for all voters or (b) provide county registrars with the resources necessary to implement their own text-message-based ballot curing system. However, as noted in the Assembly Elections Committee's analysis of this bill, this bill does not require a county elections official to use either the statewide system or resources provided by the SOS to implement a local system, potentially resulting in inconsistent efforts across the state.

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