

Date of Hearing: August 5, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 1420 (Richardson) – As Amended June 18, 2026

Policy Committee: Elections

Vote: 7 - 0

Urgency: Yes

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: Yes

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the Secretary of State (SOS) to promulgate regulations to allow a voter to cast their vote-by-mail (VBM) ballot in person following certain procedures.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the SOS to promulgate regulations that a county elections official must follow to allow a voter to cast their VBM ballot in person, without the VBM identification envelope, following certain procedures.
- 2) Requires the SOS to consider different voting technologies and systems used in other counties and consult with county registrars of voters and other election stakeholders when promulgating the regulations.
- 3) Requires the SOS to post the regulations online and include information about existing in-person VBM and early voting procedures in the state voter information guide (VIG).

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) One-time costs of approximately \$55,000 to the SOS to consult with specified stakeholders and promulgate VBM regulations (General Fund). The SOS notes that the procedures required by this bill are already addressed through existing Elections Code provisions, constitutional ballot secrecy requirements, county election administration practices, and SOS guidance documents, resulting in a “definite redundancy to these regulations.” Additionally, minor and absorbable costs to the SOS to post the regulations online and update the VIG.
- 2) By requiring a county elections official to follow certain in-person VBM procedures, this bill may create a state-mandated local program. If the Commission on State Mandates determines the provisions of this bill create a new program or impose a higher level of service for which the state must reimburse local costs, the county may seek reimbursement from the state (General Fund). However, any such costs would likely be minor and absorbable, as the specified procedures generally follow existing law.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** The author notes that the practice of accepting VBM ballots at physical voting locations pursuant to AB 626 (Pellerin), Chapter 661, Statutes of 2023, in Placer County improved ballot processing time by three to four days. According to the author:

However, widespread adoption of this new voting method has remained slow and fragmented across California. By increasing voters' awareness of new voting methods and creating statewide guidelines to address implementation and security, California can quickly expand its use of these new voting options and better address the long delays that surround our elections.

This bill is co-sponsored by Protect Democracy United and the California Voter Foundation and supported by other voter empowerment groups and the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials.

- 2) **VBM Ballots.** AB 626 permits a voter to return their VBM ballot, without the identification envelope, in person at the polling place designated for the voter's home precinct or at a vote center, if the election board: (a) has real-time access to the county elections official's election management system to verify that the voter has not already returned a VBM ballot for that election, and (b) changes the status of the voter in the system from a VBM voter to an in-person voter. AB 1249 (Wilson), Chapter 296, Statutes of 2025, builds on AB 626 by requiring a non-Voter's Choice Act (VCA) county to provide at least one early voting location open for at least six hours on the Saturday before a statewide election where the voter may return their VBM ballot in person without the identification envelope.

As noted in the Assembly Elections Committee's analysis of this bill:

According to the author and sponsor, approximately 30 counties allow a person to cast their VBM ballot in-person without the identification envelope. It is unclear, however, how widely available throughout the county this option is offered as a county must have real-time access to their election management system in order to verify that a voter has not already returned their ballot. Due to this condition, it may be more feasible for a VCA county to implement this process as they are already linked to their county's voter database in real-time. A non-VCA county may only offer this voting option at their elections office, unless their polling places are equipped with technology, such as e-pollbooks, to verify a voter's status in real time.

The author contends that widespread adoption of this new voting option has remained slow and increased awareness is needed. Others argue that this option is already offered where feasible and requiring the SOS to develop regulations will not necessarily increase its usage.

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