

Date of Hearing: August 19, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Gail Pellerin, Chair

SB 280 (Cervantes and Pellerin) – As Amended August 18, 2025

SENATE VOTE: [not relevant]

SUBJECT: Elections.

SUMMARY: Calls a statewide special election to be held on November 4, 2025 (2025 special election), and requires ACA 8 (Rivas and McGuire) of the current legislative session to be submitted to the voters at that election. Specifies procedures for conducting the 2025 special election. Appropriates funds from the General Fund (GF) to the Secretary of State (SOS) and to counties for 2025 special election costs. Makes various changes to state law governing candidate filing for the June 2, 2026, statewide primary election (2026 primary election). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Calls the 2025 special election to be held on November 4, 2025, and requires the SOS to submit ACA 8 (Rivas and McGuire) of the current legislative session to the voters at that election, notwithstanding specified provisions of existing law. Requires ACA 8 to be designated as Proposition 50 on the ballot.
- 2) States the intent of the Legislature to ensure counties have sufficient funding to effectuate the 2025 special election. Appropriates an amount from the GF to the Controller for the actual and reasonably necessary costs, as determined by the Director of the Department of Finance (Finance Director), for the counties to conduct the 2025 special election. Requires the Controller to allocate these funds to counties according to a schedule provided by the Finance Director, and requires any excess funds received by a county to be used to offset state costs for the next statewide election conducted by the county. Requires each county to report its final total cost to administer the 2025 special election to the SOS in a manner and by a date determined by the SOS. Appropriates an amount from the GF to the SOS for the actual and reasonably necessary costs, as determined by the Finance Director, for the SOS to administer the 2025 special election, and requires the SOS, no later than April 1, 2026, to report on the final costs of the statewide special election to the Finance Director and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, as specified.
- 3) Authorizes a district, city, or other political subdivision that called a regular or special local election on or before August 8, 2025, and scheduled to be held on November 4, 2025, to consolidate that local election with the 2025 special election. Prohibits a district, city, or other political subdivision from calling a special election to be held on November 4, 2025, after the effective date of this bill.
- 4) Requires the SOS, if a city, county, or city and county is required to provide a translation of ballot materials in a language other than English, to provide a translation of the ballot title and summary and the ballot label of Proposition 50 to the city, county, or city and county not later than a date determined by the SOS. Provides that the SOS is not required to consult with an advisory body of language experts and nonpartisan organizations that advocate on behalf

of, or provide services to, individuals that speak that language for these purposes.

- 5) Allows the translations of the ballot title and summary and the ballot label to be made available for public examination at a later date than the start of the public examination period for the state voter information guide, provided that the translations of the ballot title and summary and the ballot label remain available for public examination for eight days. Permits a voter to seek a writ of mandate for the purpose of requiring the translations, or portions thereof, to be amended or deleted only within that eight-day period. Requires the public to be permitted to examine the condensed ballot title and summary of the measure for eight days. Permits a voter to seek a writ of mandate for the purpose of requiring the condensed ballot title and summary, or portions thereof, to be amended or deleted only within that eight-day period. Provides that the ballot label for the measure shall not include a list of supporters and opponents, notwithstanding specified provisions of existing law.
- 6) Requires the impartial analysis of Proposition 50 prepared by the Legislative Analyst for inclusion in the state voter information guide for the 2025 special election to include all of the following:
 - a) A hyperlink to the text of AB 604 (Aguiar-Curry and Lena Gonzalez) of the current legislative session.
 - b) One or more visual depictions of the geographic map or maps of the congressional districts that were certified by the Citizens Redistricting Commission (CRC) in 2021.
 - c) One or more visual depictions of the geographic map or maps of the congressional districts that are created by AB 604. Permits the Legislative Analyst, for the purpose of complying with this requirement, to use the geographic map or maps of the congressional districts that are displayed on the webpage of the Assembly Committee on Elections or of the Senate Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments.
- 7) Permits the following adjustments to in-person voting requirements for the purposes of the 2025 special election:
 - a) Permits a county that conducts the 2025 special election pursuant to the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) to choose to comply with the following procedures in lieu of the procedures for in-person voting that would otherwise be applicable in that county under existing law:
 - i) From November 1, 2025 to November 3, 2025, for a minimum of eight hours per day, and on Election Day from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., provide at least one vote center for every 30,000 registered voters within the county, as specified; and,
 - ii) From October 25, 2025 through October 31, 2025, for a minimum of eight hours per day, provide at least one vote center for every 60,000 registered voters, as specified.
 - b) Authorizes a county that does not conduct the 2025 special election pursuant to the VCA to choose to comply with the following procedures in lieu of the procedures for in-person voting that would otherwise be applicable in that county under existing law:

- i) While maintaining separate geographical precincts under the existing limits on number of voters provided in existing law, establish consolidated precinct boards, located within the same physical polling place, serving voters residing in multiple adjacent precincts, at a maximum ratio of one consolidated precinct board location for every 10,000 registered voters.
 - ii) Require the consolidated polling locations to be open from November 1, 2025 through November 3, 2025, for at least eight hours each day, and from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on the day of the election, as specified.
 - iii) Require the county to provide at least one location, open during regular business hours beginning October 7, 2025, at which a voter may vote, register to vote, or receive a replacement ballot, as specified. Making these services available at the permanent office of the county elections official would satisfy this requirement.
- 8) Specifies that the number of ballot drop-off locations that a county is required to provide for the 2025 special election shall be determined based on the number of registered voters in the county as of the last report of registration issued by the SOS.
- 9) Requires the SOS to establish a process for the 2025 special election to consider requests from counties that do not conduct that election pursuant to the VCA to adjust or partially waive the minimally required number, location, or operational duration of consolidated polling places, or to partially waive the provisions regarding the maximum number of voters in a precinct, as specified.
- 10) Prohibits an elections official from certifying the results of the 2025 special election prior to the 28th calendar day following the election. Permits an elections official, if during the official canvass there are no vote by mail (VBM) ballots remaining for which a voter has the opportunity either to verify their signature or to provide their signature and has not already done so, to certify the results of the statewide special election prior to the 28th calendar day following the election.
- 11) Requires an elections official to accept a completed signature verification statement, unsigned identification envelope statement, or a combined VBM ballot signature verification statement and unsigned identification envelope statement until 5 p.m. on the 26th calendar day following the 2025 special election.
- 12) Permits an elections official, if the only ballots that the elections official has left to count as part of the official canvass for the 2025 special election are VBM ballots for which a voter has the opportunity either to verify their signature or to provide their signature, and the elections official does not need to continue the official canvass for at least six hours per day in order to complete the official canvass by the 28th calendar day following the election, to continue the official canvass for fewer than six hours per day until completion.
- 13) Makes the following changes for the purposes of the 2026 primary election only, and requires these change to be automatically repealed on January 1, 2027:
 - a) Changes to Candidate Nomination and Filing Processes:

- i) Requires petitions for collecting signatures-in-lieu of paying a filing fee (SIL petitions) to be made available beginning December 19, 2025, instead of December 11, 2025.
 - ii) Requires the number of signatures needed on an SIL petition to be reduced proportionately to the reduced number of days to collect signatures on an SIL petition for the same office under existing law.
 - iii) Provides the following changes to be made for the purposes of the 2026 primary election only if ACA 8 is approved by the voters and takes effect, and the congressional maps in AB 604 become operative, as specified:
 - (1) Prohibits a candidate for the office of Representative in Congress from using the word "incumbent" as a ballot designation in the 2026 primary election. Specifies that this provision does not prevent a candidate from using the title of the office that the candidate holds as the ballot designation (e.g., "Member of the Assembly," or "United States Representative").
 - (2) Provides that an existing five-day extension of the candidate filing period that occurs when an eligible incumbent does not file for reelection by the candidate filing deadline does not apply to the offices of Representative in Congress. Provides, instead, that the candidate filing period for the office of Representative in Congress shall be extended by five days if no person who currently holds the office of Representative in Congress files as a candidate in that district by the candidate filing deadline, or if every person who currently holds that office and who files in that district subsequently withdraws those nomination documents before the candidate filing deadline, as specified.
 - b) Changes to Preelection Reports and Notices:
 - i) Requires the SOS to determine and publically announce not later than December 19, 2025, whether it is feasible to include the number of voters, by party preferences, in each congressional district in the state in the first statewide preelection report of registration that reflects all voters who are registered voters on the 154th day before the election, and specifies how the SOS provides the report if the SOS determines that it is not feasible to include the information.
 - ii) Requires the SOS, not later than December 19, 2025, to prepare a calendar of key election dates and deadlines and requirements for the nomination and election of candidates pursuant to state law, including the provisions of this bill.
- 14) Contains a severability clause.
- 15) Contains an urgency clause, allowing this bill to take effect immediately upon enactment.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires every constitutional amendment, bond measure, or other legislative measure submitted to the people by the Legislature to appear on the ballot of the first statewide

election occurring at least 131 days after the adoption of the proposal by the Legislature, except as specified. (Elections Code §9040)

- 2) Requires the Legislative Analyst to prepare an impartial analysis of each state ballot measure describing the measure and including a fiscal analysis of the measure, as specified. Requires the title and summary of any measure that appears on the ballot to be amended to contain a summary of the Legislative Analyst's fiscal analysis. (Elections Code §9087)
- 3) Requires the Attorney General to provide to the SOS a ballot title and summary and a condensed ballot title and summary (also known as a ballot label), and requires the SOS to make a copy of ballot labels for the statewide ballot measures available for public examination prior to printing on any ballot. Requires the ballot label to include a listing of supporters and opponents of the measure, as specified. (Elections Code §§303, 9050, 9051, 13247)
- 4) Requires the public to be permitted to examine the condensed ballot title and summary for at least 20 days, and permits a voter to seek a writ of mandate requiring a condensed ballot title and summary, or portion thereof, to be amended or deleted, as specified. (Elections Code §13282)
- 5) Requires the SOS, whenever a city, county, or city and county is required by federal law to provide translated ballot materials, to provide a translation of the ballot title and summary and of the ballot label in that language to the city, county, or city and county for each state measure submitted to the voters in a statewide election not later than 68 days before that election. Requires the SOS, when preparing a translation, to consult with an advisory body consisting of language experts and nonpartisan organizations that advocate on behalf of, or provide services to, individuals that speak that language. Requires all translations to be made available for public examination in the same time and manner as the state voter information guide is made available for public examination. (Elections Code §9054)
- 6) Requires a precinct boundary to be fixed in a manner so that the number of voters in the precinct does not exceed 1,000 on the 88th day prior to the day of election, unless otherwise provided by law. (Elections Code §12223) Permits an elections official conducting local, special, or consolidated elections, or statewide elections other than the direct primary, presidential primary, or general election, to divide the territory within which the election is to be held into special election or consolidated election precincts by consolidating existing precincts. Provides that not more than six existing precincts may be consolidated into one special election or consolidated election precinct. (Elections Code §12241)
- 7) Authorizes any county, pursuant to the VCA, to conduct elections in which vote centers and ballot drop-off locations are available prior to and on election day, in lieu of operating polling places for the election, subject to certain conditions. (Elections Code §§4005 et seq.)
- 8) Requires a county elections official, upon receiving a VBM ballot, to compare the signature on the VBM ballot identification envelope with a signature appearing on any affidavit of registration of the voter, or on any form issued by an elections official that contains the voter's signature and is part of the voter's registration record. (Elections Code §3019(a)(1))

- 9) Requires, in the case of a VBM ballot identification envelope that was not signed by the voter, or in the case of an identification envelope that was signed but where the signature on the envelope did not compare to the signatures on file for the voter, that the voter be sent a statement by which the voter may verify under penalty of perjury that the voter completed and returned the VBM ballot in question, as specified. Requires this notice to be sent not later than eight days prior to the certification of the election. Requires the elections official to post the statement for verifying a voter's VBM ballot on the elections official's website. Provides that a voter's VBM ballot shall not be rejected if the voter submits a completed statement by 5 p.m. two days prior to the certification of the election and the signature on that statement compares to a signature on file in the voter's registration record, as specified. (Elections Code §§3019(d), 3019(e))
- 10) Provides, generally, that if an incumbent who is eligible to run for reelection does not file nomination documents by the 88th day before the election, as specified, that any person other than the incumbent shall have until the 83rd day before the election to file nomination documents for that office. (Elections Code §8020)
- 11) Permits a candidate who is running for an office for which there is a filing fee to submit a petition containing signatures of registered voters to reduce or waive the filing fee, commonly referred to as an SIL petition. (Elections Code §§8061, 8105, 8106) Requires SIL petitions to be made available beginning 60 days before the first day for circulating nomination papers, except as specified, and requires SIL petitions to be filed at least 30 days before the close of the nomination period. (Elections Code §8106 (b)(2) &(b)(3))

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

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

California cannot stand idly by while Republicans rig the rules in Texas and other GOP states to undermine fair representation in Congress and silence our state's voters.

Senate Bill 280 provides the necessary steps and funding to conduct a statewide special election on November 4 to allow the Legislature to redraw California's congressional districts if Texas and other GOP states pursue partisan gerrymanders to eliminate seats now held by Democrats. Following the 2030 Census, as already scheduled, the California Citizens Redistricting Commission would then redraw new congressional maps.

SB 280 also makes changes to the June 2026 statewide primary that will go into effect if Assembly Constitutional Amendment 8 is approved by California voters and Assembly Bill 604 becomes operative.

- 2) **Voter's Choice Act and Previous Legislation:** In 2016, the Legislature passed and Governor Brown signed SB 450 (Allen), Chapter 832, Statutes of 2016, which established the VCA and provided a new model for counties to administer elections. Counties that conduct elections pursuant to the VCA are not required to establish polling places for

elections, but instead must establish vote centers. Vote centers are polling locations at which any registered voter in a county can return their ballot, register to vote, and vote, regardless of the voter's precinct. VCA counties must open some vote centers beginning 10 days before the election, and generally must open a larger number of vote centers from the third day before the election through Election Day. The VCA also requires counties to establish a specified number of ballot drop-off locations that are available beginning 28 days before each election, and requires counties to conduct robust voter education and outreach campaigns to educate voters about their options for voting under the VCA.

Following the enactment of SB 450 in 2016, five counties elected to change their election model to the VCA for the 2018 elections. In 2020, 10 counties made the switch and in 2022, 12 more counties opted to conduct their elections using the VCA model. For the November 2024 statewide presidential general election, 29 counties conducted their elections using the VCA model. The remaining 29 counties that conduct their elections using traditional neighborhood polling places.

- 3) **Elections Procedures:** If this bill is signed into law, a county elections official will have a short timeframe to prepare for the 2025 special election. In order to accommodate the condensed timeframe, this bill proposes adjustments to the conduct of the statewide special election that are similar to previous bills calling statewide special elections. For instance, this bill provides counties with the option to choose to provide reduced in-person voting locations in lieu of the procedures for in-person voting that would otherwise be applicable in that county under existing law. Additionally, this bill requires the SOS to establish a process to consider requests from non-VCA counties to adjust or partially waive the minimally required number, location, or operational duration of consolidated polling places, or to partially waive the maximum number of voters in a precinct, as specified. These are similar to provisions that were included in SB 152 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 34, Statutes of 2021, which established procedures for the conduct of the 2021 gubernatorial recall election.
- 4) **2026 Primary Election Calendar and Previous Legislation:** If this bill is signed into law, the elections calendar for the 2025 special election may create conflicts with the 2026 primary election calendar. For example, existing law requires SIL petitions to be made available beginning 173 days before the election, or December 11, 2025. That date falls before the statutory deadline for the SOS to issue final election results for the 2025 special election. To ensure that the results of the 2025 special election are clear when the candidate filing process begins for the 2026 primary election, this bill proposes adjustments to the candidate filing process. For instance, this bill requires SIL petitions for the 2026 primary election to be made available beginning December 19, 2025, instead of December 11, 2025, and requires the number of signatures needed on an SIL petition to be reduced proportionately to the reduced number of days to collect signatures on an SIL petition. The changes this bill proposes are similar to changes that SB 594 (Glazer), Chapter 320, Statutes of 2021, made to state law governing candidate filing for the 2022 statewide primary election due to COVID-related delays in the release of census data and the adoption of new district lines by the CRC.
- 5) **Ballot Cure and Previous Legislation:** Under California law, a VBM ballot must be verified by an elections official before it can be counted. That verification includes a comparison of the signature on the VBM ballot identification envelope with the signatures

that are part of the voter's registration record to confirm that the voter who was issued the VBM ballot is the voter who completed and returned the ballot.

It is not uncommon for a VBM ballot to be returned in an envelope that is missing the voter's signature or with a signature that doesn't compare to signatures in the voter's record. There are processes under existing law for a voter to verify their VBM ballot if the voter failed to sign the VBM ballot return envelope, or if the signature on that envelope did not compare to the signatures in the voter's registration record. These processes are commonly referred to as "cure processes," and the forms used by voters to verify their ballots as a part of these processes are commonly referred to as "cure forms." Existing law provides that a voter must be permitted to complete either cure process until at least 5 p.m. two days prior to the certification of the election.

Elections officials are not required to certify elections results on a specific day, but instead must certify results no later than a specified deadline. As a result, the deadline for a voter to complete these cure processes varies from county to county, depending on when each county certifies its election results. Last year, AB 3184 (Berman), Chapter 437, Statutes of 2024, provided a uniform certification deadline—and a uniform deadline for voters to complete the cure process—in all California counties for the 2024 presidential general election only. This bill similarly requires voters to be given until the 26th day after the 2025 special election to resolve specified issues with their VBM ballots, and prohibits an elections official from certifying the results of that election prior to the 28th calendar day following the election, except as specified.

- 6) **Support and Opposition:** At the time this analysis was prepared, the committee had not received position letters specifically addressing this bill. However, the committee has received significant public input through a Redistricting Public Comment portal that was made available on the Committee's website on August 13, 2025. Those public comments generally were focused on the proposal for California to use new congressional district maps for elections through 2030 if Texas, Florida, or other states voluntarily implement new congressional maps. For a discussion of the comments received through the portal, please see this committee's analysis of ACA 8 (Rivas and McGuire).
- 7) **Related Legislation:** ACA 8 (Rivas and McGuire), which is also being heard in this committee today, provides for the use of new congressional district maps for elections held through 2030 if Texas, Florida, or other states voluntarily put a new congressional map into effect, as specified.

AB 604 (Aguiar-Curry and Lena Gonzalez), which is pending in the Senate Elections & Constitutional Amendments Committee, and which this committee is discussing as an informational item at today's hearing, specifies the boundaries for California's congressional districts that will take effect if the voters approve ACA 8 and if another state voluntarily engages in mid-decade congressional redistricting, as specified.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

See comment #6 above for an explanation about support for and opposition to this bill.

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