

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 3 (Cervantes) – As Amended July 17, 2025

Policy Committee: Elections

Vote: 7 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: Yes

SUMMARY:

This bill revises the process for verifying signatures on vote by mail (VBM) ballot identification envelopes and increases the frequency with which an elections official must post updated election results.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires a VBM ballot identification envelope contain a statement that the elections official is required to compare the voter's signature on the envelope with the signature in the voter's registration record, which may include the signature on the voter's driver's license or state identification card.
- 2) Requires the Secretary of State (SOS) publish on its website a VBM signature verification statement and unsigned envelope statement form ("signature cure forms"). An elections official is prohibited from accepting a signature cure form created by an entity other than the elections official or the SOS, but a voter may work with a non-governmental entity to complete a signature cure form developed by the elections official or SOS.
- 3) Allows a VBM observer to challenge the manner in which an individual handling a VBM ballot is following procedures for verifying the signature on a signature cure form.
- 4) Requires an elections official post on its website updated election results at least twice per week (twice by Thursday the week after the election), instead of once per week, and revises the format of how the results must be reported.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) Ongoing per election costs of approximately \$5,000 to the SOS to develop and translate signature cure forms (General Fund).
- 2) Costs of an unknown, but potentially significant amount, in excess of \$150,000, across 58 counties to require an elections official to revise identification envelopes, modify signature curing processes, and provide more frequent election result updates. While some counties anticipate minor and absorbable per-election costs, other counties anticipate per-election costs in the tens of thousands of dollars. The magnitude of costs depends on the number of voters whose VBM ballots require signature curing. If the Commission on State Mandates determines this bill's requirements to be a reimbursable state mandate, the state would need to reimburse these costs to counties (General Fund).

COMMENTS:

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

Recent experience has shown that signature curing is rapidly becoming an integral part of political campaigns in California. However, as this area of campaign practice develops, it is clear that the existing laws governing signature curing contain several areas of ambiguity that threaten to create confusion for voters, invite abuse of the rules by bad actors, and undermine public confidence in our election results. [This bill] will help provide clarity and guidance to political campaigns, as well as consistency and transparency to the public, about the signature curing process by making several reforms to how the process works.

This bill is supported by Disability Rights California and Election Integrity Project California.

2) **Background. VBM Signature Curing.** Existing law creates a process for a voter to verify their VBM ballot if the voter fails to sign the VBM ballot return envelope, or if the signature on the envelope does not compare to the signature in the voter's registration record. The elections official must send such a voter a signature cure form to verify under penalty of perjury that the voter completed and returned the VBM ballot in question. A voter has until 5 p.m. two days prior to the certification of the election to complete the cure process.

At the November 2024 statewide general election, more than 71,000 VBM ballots were unable to be counted because the signatures on the identification envelopes did not compare to the registration record signature of the voter in question, and more than 13,000 VBM ballots were rejected because the identification envelope was not signed by the voter. On March 18, 2025, the Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee held an informational hearing on the signature curing process. This bill revises the signature curing process based on the testimony and feedback from the SOS, county elections officials, political attorneys, and other stakeholders at the hearing.

Official Canvass. AB 63 (Cervantes), Chapter 514, Statutes of 2023, requires an elections official to publicly update election results at least once a week during the official canvass, beginning the Thursday after the election. This requirement provides the public with regular election results that reflect ongoing receipt of VBM ballots that arrive after election night. Early versions of AB 63 would have required elections officials to update results no less than three times a week during the official canvass, but the requirement was pared back to twice a week, then once a week, in response to policy and fiscal concerns. This bill increases the frequency of election result updates to a minimum of twice per week and modifies how such updates must be reported.

3) **Related Legislation.** AB 827 (Berman) requires voters be given until the 22nd day after each election to submit a signature cure form and makes other changes to facilitate signature curing. AB 827 is pending on the Senate Appropriations Committee's suspense file.

AB 1214 (Patterson) requires an elections official to post updated election results online at least twice per week, identical to one provision of this bill. AB 1214 is pending hearing by the Senate Appropriations Committee.

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