
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 884 (Umberg) - Elections in 2026 through 2029

Version: April 28, 2026

Urgency: Yes

Hearing Date: May 4, 2026

Policy Vote: JUD. 11 - 0, E. & C.A. 4 - 1

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Robert Ingenito

Bill Summary: SB 884 would make changes to vote by mail (VBM) drop off locations, the deadline for when VBM ballots must be received, and activities allowed up to 200 feet of a polling location for elections in 2026 through 2029.

Fiscal Impact:

- By increasing the duties of local elections officials, this bill creates a state-mandated local program. To the extent the Commission on State Mandates determines that the provisions of this bill create a new program or impose a higher level of service on local agencies, local agencies could claim reimbursement of those costs. The magnitude is unknown, but at a minimum could reach the low millions of dollars per election cycle. (General Fund).
- The Secretary of State (SOS) indicates that the bill would not have a fiscal impact.

Background: November 2024 General Election, counties conducted elections using one of three models: vote centers, polling places, or all-mail. Each election model provides a different set of services for voters. For VBM ballots drop-off locations, counties using the vote center model needed to provide at least two VBM ballot drop-off locations or one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 15,000 registered voters, whichever resulted in more locations. For counties using the polling place or all-mail model, at least two VBM ballot drop-off locations or one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 30,000 registered voters, whichever resulted in more locations. All VBM ballot drop-off locations needed to be open 28 days prior to and through Election Day. SOS data indicate that 29 counties used the vote center model, 25 counties used the polling place model, and four counties used the all-mail model. In total, there were 1,968 VBM ballot drop-off locations throughout California.

California voters have increasingly relied on VBM ballots to cast a vote. SOS data indicate that, for the 1962 general election 2.6 percent of the state's voters did so by mail. That percentage rose to 81 percent for the 2024 General Election, and 89 percent for the statewide special election in 2025. This increase reflects many factors, including (1) legislation expanding access to VBM ballots, (2) paid postage on return envelopes, and (3) additional elected offices resulting in longer, sometimes more complicated, and time-consuming ballots.

A rejected ballot is a ballot not counted because of (1) a missing signature, (2) a noncomparing signature, (3) the ballot was missing from the envelope, (4) multiple

ballots were returned in one envelope, (5) the ballot was not received on time, (6) the voter already voted, or (7) there is a missing or incorrect address on the envelope. Some VBM ballots are rejected at every election for various reasons. A ballot can also be rejected if a voter did not provide their driver's license number, identification card number, or last four digits of their social security number when registering to vote and did not provide a form of identification when voting for the first time. For the 2024 presidential general election, 33,016 ballots of the 122,480 total number of rejected ballots were rejected because the VBM ballot was not received on time.

The earliest reference to a 100-foot electioneering prohibition dates back to at least 1891 where the Political Code stated, "No officer of election, nor any person, shall do any electioneering on election day within one hundred feet of any polling place." The Political Code (which later became the Elections Code) from 1891 also stated, "No person shall solicit a vote or speak to a voter on the subject of marking his ticket within one hundred feet of the polling place." It should be noted that where the 100-foot prohibition is measured from has changed over time, but the actual number, 100 feet, has remained generally the same with some exceptions.

SB 35 (2021) among other provisions, modified the distance prohibiting electioneering and other prescribed political activities to within the 100 feet from the entrance of a building that contains a polling location, an elections official's office, a satellite location, or from an outdoor voting area where a voter may cast their ballot or drop off a ballot. Prior to the bill, the electioneering prohibition zone extended from the voting room instead of the building.

Proposed Law: This bill, for any regular or special election, beginning with the November 3, 2026, statewide General Election, held in 2026 through 2029, would do the following:

- Require all counties to provide at least 2 ballot dropoff locations or at least 1 ballot dropoff location for every 11,250 registered voters and require that these ballot dropoff locations be open beginning at least 30 days before the election.
- Deem vote by mail ballots timely cast if they are received by the elections official up to 10 days after election day.
- Prohibit federal, state, or local law enforcement officers from making arrests within 200 feet of a polling place on election day, except for a crime related to disrupting the operation of the polling place or a crime against a person or property.
- Authorize a county board of supervisors to extend the prohibition on electioneering activities to up to 200 feet of the specified voting locations
- Authorize a county elections official to extend the time for closing the polls at any polling place if the county elections official determines that voting at the polling place was disrupted as a result of a violation of the prohibitions on enforcement of federal immigration laws or electioneering.

Related Legislation:

- AB 5 (Berman, Chapter 250, Statutes of 2025) required county election officials to report vote totals for all ballots, except specified types of ballots that require special processing, by the 13th day after the election. These exceptions included ballots needing to be duplicated, VBM ballots forwarded from a county to county of origin, VBM ballots with an issue with the voter's signature, provisional ballots, ballots cast by a person who votes through conditional voter registration, and ballots received by an elections official after the fourth day following Election Day. The elections official may also file a notice of extension with the Secretary of State and include the reason for the extension.
- SB 851 (Cervantes, Chapter 238, Statutes of 2025) among other provisions, expanded the prohibition for a person in possession of a firearm or any uniformed peace officer, private guard, or security personnel or any person who is wearing a uniform of a peace officer, guard, or security personnel, to be stationed in the immediate vicinity of, or posted at, a polling location to include an officer or agent of a federal law enforcement agency, unless certain conditions are met.
- SB 35 (Umberg, Chapter 318, Statutes of 2021) among other provisions, modified the distance prohibiting electioneering and other prescribed political activities to within the 100 feet from the entrance of a building that contains a polling location, an elections official's office, a satellite location, or from an outdoor voting area where a voter may cast their ballot or drop off a ballot.

Staff Comments: This bill would modify the minimum threshold used for determining the number of VBM ballot drop-off locations to at least two VBM ballot drop-off locations within the county or at least one VBM ballot drop-off location for every 11,250 registered voters, whichever results in more VBM ballot drop-off locations. This would result in an increase in the number of VBM ballot drop-off locations throughout the State.

Any local government costs resulting from the bill's expanding the scope of an existing crime are not state-reimbursable.

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