

July 12, 2016

The Honorable Shirley Weber, Chair  
Assembly Committee on Elections and Redistricting  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SB 450 (Allen, Hertzberg) California New Motor Voter Act – SUPPORT**

Dear Assembly Member Ridley-Thomas,

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors are pleased to support SB 450 (Allen, Hertzberg), which would modernize California elections to provide greater flexibility and convenience for voters.

California's voter participation rates hit a historical low last year. Only 31% of eligible citizens cast a ballot in the General Election, ranking our state 43rd in voter participation. Only 8.2% of 18-24 year olds voted. Additionally, California's election administration is ineffective. In 2012, the Pew Charitable Trusts' Elections Performance Index (EPI) ranked California 49<sup>th</sup> overall in administering elections. The EPI compares voter registration, voter turnout, provisional ballot use, rejected ballots, and reported problems. We should make every effort to facilitate the participation of all citizens in our democracy by improving the ways we administer elections.

While voter participation was historically low nationwide in 2014, some states maintained stronger participation. For example, Colorado had the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest voter turnout last year – 56% of their eligible citizens cast a ballot. The state recently enacted numerous reforms to improve election administration. Colorado's recent reforms include sending every voter a ballot nearly a month before Election Day, providing locations to drop off a ballot, replacing polling places with vote centers which any voter in a county may use, providing nearly 2 weeks of early, in-person voting, and allowing for same day voter registration at each vote center.

Inspired by the success in Colorado, SB 450 would allow California counties, beginning in 2018, to implement a new election model to provide new benefits to voters;

- Every voter can start voting a month before. Every registered voter will receive a ballot a month before Election Day. Voters have the option of mailing their ballot back, dropping it at a ballot drop-box or any vote center in their county;
- Every voter can vote in-person at least 10 days before Election Day, which includes 2 weekends;
- Every Voter can vote where they want. Voters can use any vote center in their county to cast a ballot. A voter can choose to vote where it is most convenient—near their work, their home, their school, or their grocery store;
- Every vote center will provide translated materials and assistance in the languages protected by the federal Voting Rights Act;

- Every vote center will have accessible voting machines to assist voters with physical impairments. Any voter can request an accessible ballot, including ballots necessary for the visually impaired;
- Every vote center will have provide Same Day Voter Registration which allows citizens to register to vote or update their registration information until the close of the polls on Election Day;
- The public will have an unprecedented voice in how elections are run. The public will have access to providing input into how elections are administered, including the location and number of vote centers and drop boxes. Counties are required to meet with community groups, present a plan to the public, seek and include public input, and must consult the public on any changes.

SB 450 contains several election reforms, such as Same Day Voter Registration and early voting, which research has demonstrated has a positive effect on voter participation. In their 2011 report “Election Day Voter Registration in California” Michael Alvarez of the California Institute of Technology and Jonathan Nagler of New York University look at the potential impact of widely available Same Day Registration. The report concludes that, if widely available, same day registration would have the following positive effects:

- Overall turnout could go up by 4.8 percent.
- Turnout among those aged 18 to 25 could increase by 9.0 percent.
- Turnout for those who have moved in the last six months could increase by 7.3 percent.
- Turnout for Latinos and newly-naturalized citizens could each rise by 5.1 percent.

In their 2013 report “Early Voting: What Works” the Brennan Center for Justice identifies the benefits and best practices for early voting. The report concluded that the key benefits of early in person voting are:

- Reduced stress on the voting system on Election Day;
- Shorter lines on Election Day;
- Improved poll worker performance;
- Early identification and correction of registration errors and voting system glitches; and
- Greater access to voting and increased voter satisfaction.

SB 450 will give voters more options, so they can vote where, when and how it is most convenient which has proven to increase voter participation. I respectfully ask for your “Aye” vote.

Sincerely,

cc: Members, Assembly Committee on Elections and Redistricting  
The Honorable Ben Allen  
The Honorable Robert Hertzberg