

Date of Hearing: July 2, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Gail Pellerin, Chair

SB 280 (Cervantes and Dahle) – As Amended April 10, 2025

**SENATE VOTE:** 38-0

**SUBJECT:** Political Reform Act of 1974: prohibition on contributions in state and local government office buildings.

**SUMMARY:** Expands existing law that prohibits a person from receiving or delivering a campaign contribution at the State Capitol or state government office building. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Expands existing law that prohibits a person from receiving or personally delivering or attempting to deliver a campaign contribution in the State Capitol or any state office building, or any office for which the state pays the majority of the rent, such that the law also applies to any *local* government office building or any office for which a *local* government pays rent. Deletes provisions of law that exempt legislative district offices from the existing prohibition, thereby making this prohibition applicable to legislative district offices.
- 2) Defines the term “state or local government office building,” for the purposes of this bill, to mean any building owned by the state or a local government in which more than 50 percent of the total floor area is used as office space for government employees.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Creates the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC), and makes it responsible for the impartial, effective administration and implementation of the Political Reform Act (PRA). (Government Code §§81000 et seq.)
- 2) Makes violations of the PRA subject to administrative, civil, and criminal penalties. (Government Code §§83116, 91000-91005.5)
- 3) Prohibits a person from receiving, personally delivering, or attempting to deliver a campaign contribution in the State Capitol, any state office building, or any office for which the state pays the majority of the rent other than a legislative district office. (Government Code §84309) Provides that the term “personally deliver,” for the purposes of this provision, includes the delivery of a copy or facsimile of a contribution, or the delivery of an original or a copy of a transmittal letter of a contribution, but does not include the delivery of a contribution by the United States Post Office. (2 Cal. Code Regs. §18439)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, negligible state costs.

**COMMENTS:**

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

The integrity of our democratic institutions depends on maintaining a clear separation between government functions that serve the public and political fundraising. In 1982, the Legislature prohibited the receipt or delivery of campaign contributions at the State Capitol, in any state office building, or any office in which the State of California pays the majority of the rent, but it made an explicit exception for legislative district offices.

District offices exist to assist constituents in dealing with government agencies and facilitate representation by the Legislature, not provide an avenue for political fundraising. This bill closes this long-standing loophole by prohibiting campaign contributions in legislative district offices and in local government offices. By creating a clear line of separation between the work of government and political campaigns, the bill will help rebuild public trust in government and reaffirm California's commitment to transparency, accountability, and ethical governance.

- 2) **Political Reform Act:** In the aftermath of the Watergate scandal, California was the first state to pass a comprehensive political reform package. California voters passed an initiative, Proposition 9, also commonly known as the PRA, in 1974 that codified significant restrictions and prohibitions on candidates, officeholders, and lobbyists and created the FPPC to implement, administer, and enforce the PRA.

The voters adopted Proposition 9 partly in reaction to scandals involving campaign finance, including the delivery of campaign contributions in the offices of elected officials, particularly in the State Capitol. However, the PRA did not originally include prohibitions on receiving campaign contributions in the office of elected officials or the State Capitol. AB 3502 (Agnos), Chapter 920, Statutes of 1982, was signed into law and prohibited a person from receiving, delivering, or attempting to deliver a campaign contribution in the State Capitol, any state office building, or any office for which the state pays the majority of the rent other than a legislative district office. It is unclear, however, why AB 3502 exempted legislative district offices.

This bill expands this prohibition to apply to any local government office building, any office which local government pays rent, and legislative district office buildings (which were previously exempt).

- 3) **Arguments in Support:** In support of this bill, California Common Cause, writes:

Currently, the Political Reform Act prohibits the delivery or receipt of campaign contributions in state office buildings, but this prohibition does not extend to local government offices or legislative district offices. SB 280 corrects this oversight by expanding the law to include all government workspaces—whether state or locally owned or rented by taxpayers—and clearly defines what constitutes a government office building.

The bill also reasonably includes offices where any portion of the rent is paid by taxpayer funds. Even if the government covers only part of the rent, the principle remains the same—taxpayer-supported spaces should not be venues for political transactions.

This is a much-needed and logical extension of current law. Government offices, regardless of jurisdiction, are spaces dedicated to serving the public, not for conducting campaign business. Allowing campaign contributions to be exchanged in these environments undermines public trust and blurs the line between public service and political fundraising. By reinforcing that distinction, SB 280 helps guard against the appearance of quid pro quo and strengthens the integrity of our democratic institutions.

- 4) **Political Reform Act of 1974:** California voters passed an initiative, Proposition 9, in 1974 that created the FPPC and codified significant restrictions and prohibitions on candidates, officeholders and lobbyists. That initiative is commonly known as the PRA. Amendments to the PRA that are not submitted to the voters, such as those contained in this bill, must further the purposes of the initiative and require a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature.

#### **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

##### **Support**

Fair Political Practices Commission (sponsor)  
California Common Cause

##### **Opposition**

None on file.

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