Date of Hearing: April 15, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS
Gail Pellerin, Chair
AB 1789 (Boerner) – As Amended March 19, 2026

SUBJECT: Political Reform Act of 1974: candidate trainings and campaign reports.

SUMMARY: Requires candidates and committee treasurers to take training classes related to their obligations under the Political Reform Act (PRA), beginning in 2029. Doubles the size of a campaign contribution or expenditure, from $100 to $200, that triggers itemized reporting on campaign disclosures. Specifically, **this bill**:

1) Requires a candidate for elective office, beginning in 2029, to complete a training course on the PRA's requirements for campaigns for that office.

    a) Requires the candidate to complete the training by the earlier of 30 days after the candidate files a statement of intention (SOI) to be a candidate or the 88th day before the election. Requires an individual who filed a SOI before January 1, 2029, to complete the course by February 28, 2029.

    b) Prohibits a candidate from appearing on the ballot if the candidate has not completed the training requirement but provides that a failure to complete the training requirement is not subject to enforcement action under the PRA.

2) Requires the campaign treasurer for a candidate-controlled committee, beginning in 2029, to complete a training course on the PRA's requirements that apply to the committee.

    a) Requires the treasurer to complete the training within 30 days of the date that the committee submits its registration, if the treasurer has not completed the training in the last four years. Requires a treasurer of a committee that registers before January 1, 2029, to complete the course by February 28, 2029, if the committee has not terminated by that date.

    b) Prohibits a committee from accepting a campaign contribution if the committee's treasurer has not completed the training by the deadline, until such time that the treasurer completes the training.

3) Requires the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) to develop, maintain, and offer the required training courses.

4) Provides that the training requirements do not apply to either of the following:

    a) An individual who completed similar training required by a local government ethics agency, as specified. Gives the FPPC discretion to determine whether another training is similar to the FPPC's training.

b) A candidate for statewide elective office or a treasurer for a committee controlled by a candidate for statewide elective office.

5) Increases, from $100 to $200, the threshold at which the following activities must be itemized on campaign disclosure statements:

a) Campaign contributions received, including information about the names, addresses, occupations, and employers of contributors.

b) Campaign expenditures made, including information about the name and address of the payee, the amount of the expenditure, and a brief description of the consideration for which the expenditure was made.

c) In the case of a disclosure statement filed by a slate mailer organization, the source (including name and address) of each payment received, the candidate or ballot measure that the payment supports or opposes, and the date and amount received.

d) In the case of a disclosure statement filed by a slate mailer organization, the recipient (including name and address) of each disbursement made, the amount of the disbursement, and a brief description of the consideration for which the disbursement was made.

EXISTING LAW:

1) Creates the FPPC, and makes it responsible for the impartial, effective administration and implementation of the PRA. (Government Code §§83100, 83111)

2) Requires state and local elected officers, candidates, and committees to file periodic campaign statements disclosing specific information including, but not limited to, all of the following:

a) The name, street address, occupation, and name of employer for each person from whom a cumulative contribution or loan of $100 or more was received during the period covered.

b) The name and street address for each person to whom an expenditure of $100 or more was made during the period covered as well as the amount and purpose of the expenditure.

c) The total amount of contributions received during the period covered from persons who gave a cumulative amount of $100 or more.

d) The total amount of contributions received during the period covered from persons who gave a cumulative amount of less than $100.

e) The total amount of expenditures made during the period covered to persons who received $100 or more.

f) The total amount of expenditures made during the period covered to persons who received less than $100. (Government Code §84211)

3) Requires slate mailer organizations to file periodic campaign statements disclosing specific information including, but not limited to, all of the following:

   a) The name and address of each entity from which the organization received a payment of $100 or more during the period covered, along with the candidate or ballot measure that the payment supports or opposes, the amount received, and the date on which the payment was received.

   b) The total amount of disbursements made during the period covered to people who received $100 or more.

   c) The total amount of disbursements made during the period covered to people who received less than $100.

   d) For each recipient of a disbursement of $100 or more, the recipient's name and address, the amount of each disbursement, and a brief description of the consideration for which each disbursement was made. (Government Code §84219)

4) Makes violations of the PRA subject to administrative, civil, and criminal penalties. (Government Code §§83116, 91000-91005.5)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. State-mandated local program; contains a crimes and infractions disclaimer.

COMMENTS:

1) **Purpose of the Bill**: According to the author, "Government transparency is important to maintain the public's trust. AB 1789 would require candidates and treasurers to take a training course with the California Fair Political Practices Commission to ensure that they understand and are prepared to comply with the Political Reform Act."

2) **Campaign Disclosure**: Disclosure of campaign contributions and expenditures serves as an integral part of efforts to prevent corruption, and the appearance thereof, that may occur through the campaign finance system. Reporting of donations and spending allows enforcement agencies, including the FPPC and local prosecutors, to enforce contribution limits and other regulations and, at times, to detect instances of bribery, contribution laundering, and other violations of the PRA.

   Disclosure in campaign finance activity is consistent with the widely held belief that government transparency is essential for public accountability. Knowing who gave how much to a political campaign is viewed as a means of deterring potentially corrupting practices. With the passage of the PRA, California voters embraced the notion that receipts and expenditures in election campaigns should be fully and truthfully disclosed in order that the voters may be fully informed and improper activities may be inhibited. This bill proposes to increase the reporting threshold on specific campaign finance activity, which will limit the amount of information available to the public.

On the other hand, because contributions of $100 or more need to be reported with specific detailed information about the contributor, some individual donors may be hesitant to donate higher amounts of money for fear of their information being made public and possible retaliation due to their public support or opposition to a candidate or ballot measure. This bill will allow individual donors to contribute higher amounts of money to political campaigns without having to disclose personal information.

3) **Contribution and Expenditure Disclosure Threshold**: When originally enacted, the PRA required the public disclosure of the names and street addresses of all campaign contributors who made contributions to a committee of $50 or more and required an itemized disclosure of all campaign expenditures of $50 or more. Subsequent legislation in 1978 (AB 3155 (W. Thomas), Chapter 650, Statutes of 1978) raised these disclosure thresholds to $100. Adjusting those thresholds for inflation, $50 in 1974 is approximately the equivalent of $333 today, while $100 in 1978 is approximately the equivalent of $522 today.

4) **Disclosure Thresholds at the Federal Level and in Other States**: Federal law requires campaign reports for political committees of federal election campaigns to disclose detailed information for contributions of $200 or more. This federal limit is higher than California's current $100 reporting threshold. According to information from the National Conference of State Legislatures (as supplemented by research by committee staff), six states have a reporting threshold of $200 or more while 43 states and the District of Columbia have a reporting threshold of $100 or less (as described in the list below).

   No Threshold (information about all contributions are reported regardless of amount): Alaska, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

   $20 Threshold: Colorado.

   $25 Threshold: Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, and Washington.

   $50 Threshold: Arkansas, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Utah.

   $90 Threshold: Texas

   $100 Threshold: Alabama, Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Kentucky, Nevada, New York, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and Wyoming.

   $150 Threshold: Illinois.

   $200 Threshold: Minnesota, Mississippi, North Dakota, and Rhode Island.

$250 Threshold: Nebraska.

$300 Threshold: New Jersey.

5) **Candidate and Treasurer Training**: Although existing law does not require candidates or committee treasurers to complete any training, the FPPC has prepared many informational and educational resources, including campaign manuals, fact sheets, and online webinars, to help educate the regulated community about their obligations under the PRA. Among other online videos, the FPPC's YouTube channel includes a Tutorial for Candidates and Treasurers that is approximately 34 minutes long and has been available since late 2018. According to the YouTube page for that video, it has been viewed approximately 11,500 times. The FPPC's YouTube channel also includes a 32-minute long training video for campaign filing officers that has been viewed approximately 3,000 times since being uploaded in 2016.

   While the use of these publicly-available resources seems to suggest that the FPPC's training resources have been well received, the total number of views on these videos represents a small fraction of the number of candidates for public office that have appeared on the ballot in California over that time. Requiring candidates and committee treasurers to complete training could considerably expand awareness of the FPPC's informational materials and of those individuals' obligations under the PRA.

   According to information provided by the author and sponsor of the bill, over the last three years, the FPPC has prosecuted approximately 90 cases involving campaign violations by candidate-controlled committees (not including cases resolved without fines or penalties). The author argues that because candidates are the most visible actors in the electoral process, campaign violations by candidates are particularly harmful to public trust, even when those violations are unintentional. Requiring candidates and treasurers to complete training about their obligations under the PRA may help reduce the number of violations caused by lack of knowledge or understanding of relevant legal requirements.

6) **Ballot Access and Suggested Amendments**: Under this bill, a candidate would not be eligible to appear on the ballot if the candidate had not completed the training requirement. Tying ballot access to the completion of training presents a number of policy and logistical concerns. For example, it is unclear how elections officials—who are responsible for certifying the candidates who have qualified for the ballot and printing ballots—will know whether candidates have completed the required training. Even if that problem were solved, requiring candidates to complete training in order to file for office could create an additional barrier for candidates who decide to run for office shortly before the candidate filing deadline. Furthermore, while the deadline for filing as a candidate generally falls on the 88th before the election, that is not always the case, including situations where the filing deadline is extended because an eligible incumbent did not file for reelection, and in special elections where filing deadlines often fall much closer to the election.

   To avoid these challenges, committee staff recommends that this bill be amended to delete the provisions of the bill that tie a candidate's ballot access to completion of the candidate training. Instead, the committee may wish to adopt an incentive for completing training like the one this bill proposes for situations where a campaign treasurer did not complete the training by the required time: namely, prohibiting the committee from accepting campaign contributions until the required training has been completed.

7) **Training Requirements and Suggested Amendments**: To ensure that the training required of candidates and treasurers by this bill is not unduly burdensome, and does not create a significant new barrier for candidates running for office, committee staff recommends several amendments. First, committee staff recommends that this bill be amended to specify that the required training be available on-demand through an online platform, internet webpage, or application, similar to a requirement that is found in AB 2592 (Pacheco), which is also being heard in this committee today, and which would transfer responsibility for lobbyist ethics training from the legislative ethics committees in the Assembly and Senate to the FPPC, beginning in 2029. Such an amendment will ensure flexibility for candidates and treasurers who are seeking to complete their training obligations.

   Second, committee staff recommends that this bill be amended to specify that candidate training is not required of candidates who indicate on their SOI that they do not intend to qualify as a recipient committee. Such an amendment would ensure that candidates who do not raise any campaign funds, or who raise very little (less than $2,000 total), are not required to complete candidate training.

   Third, committee staff recommends that the bill be amended to specify a limit on the length of the required training. Staff recommends that candidate training be limited to no longer than 90 minutes total, and that campaign treasurer training be limited to no more than 120 minutes.

   These amendments should help ensure that the training envisioned by this bill provides candidates and treasurers with a useful overview of their obligations under the PRA without being an unreasonable burden on political participation.

   Finally, committee staff notes that this bill does not authorize the FPPC to charge a fee for the training required by this bill. Furthermore, existing law generally does not give the FPPC the authority to impose fees in the absence of express statutory authorization. If this bill subsequently is amended to allow for fees to be imposed for candidate and committee treasurer training, those fees could present similar policy concerns about the potential that the training requirement could unreasonably burden participation in the electoral process.

8) **Statewide Candidates and Their Treasurers**: This bill excludes candidates for statewide office and their treasurers from the requirement to complete the bill's required training. According to the sponsor of this bill, that limitation was included due to the fact that candidates for statewide office often are more experienced in dealing with the PRA, and thus are less likely to benefit from the training required by this bill.

   While it is true that many candidates for statewide office have a history of serving in elective office and with complying with the PRA, that is not universally true. For example, the primary election ballot for this year's race for Governor includes 61 candidates, many of whom appear to have little or no history of having held or run for elective federal, state, or local office. In light of that fact, the author and sponsor of this bill may wish to consider whether the exclusion of statewide candidates and their treasurers from this bill's training requirements is appropriate.

9) **Arguments in Support**: The sponsor of this bill, the FPPC, writes in support:

> AB 1789 would, starting January 1, 2029, require candidates and treasurers to complete a training course on their duties under the PRA, subject to specific deadlines. The consequences for failure to complete the training are designed to compel timely compliance, to ensure that candidates and treasurers receive this training when it is most pertinent and beneficial. Devoting time to education will not only assist candidates but also improve compliance and timely transparency.
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> AB 1789 would also raise the itemization threshold from $100 to $200 dollars, for purposes of reporting contributions and expenditures on campaign reports. The $100 threshold was set by legislation more than 45 years ago, and this adjustment reflects a very modest cost of living adjustment that is less than half of the actual [Consumer Price Index] inflation amount.

10) **Related Legislation**: AB 2592 (Pacheco), which is also being heard in this committee today, transfers responsibility for lobbyist ethics training from the legislative ethics committees in the Assembly and Senate to the FPPC, beginning in 2029.

11) **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)

Opposition

None on file.

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