

Date of Hearing: April 15, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Gail Pellerin, Chair

AB 2604 (Berman) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

SUBJECT: Elections: ballot curing.

SUMMARY: Requires the Secretary of State (SOS) to implement a system that allows voters to access text-message-based ballot curing, as defined, or make available to county registrars the resources necessary to implement such a system, as specified. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the SOS to do either of the following:
 - a) Implement a system that allows voters to access text-message-based ballot curing; or,
 - b) Make available to county registrars the resources necessary to implement a system that allows voters to access text-message-based ballot curing.
- 2) Provides, for purposes of this bill, that “ballot curing” means procedures in which an elections official sends a signature cure form to a voter whose vote by mail (VBM) ballot envelope was missing their signature or where the voter’s signature did not compare to signature(s) in the voter’s registration record, to verify under penalty of perjury that the voter completed and returned the VBM ballot in question.
- 3) Requires any text-message-based ballot curing service provided by the SOS or by counties, to ensure data privacy and ballot security for voters.
- 4) Requires the SOS to make available on its internet website data relating to the text-message-based ballot curing program, including:
 - a) The number of voters who cured ballots using text-message-based ballot curing;
 - b) The number of voters to whom text-message-based ballot curing was offered;
 - c) The number of voters who cured their ballot by other means;
 - d) The number of voters who did not cure their ballots; and,
 - e) The median time between notification and curing for both text-message-based and traditional ballot curing.
- 5) Permits the SOS to combine the text-message-based ballot curing system with the ballot tracking system that a county or the SOS maintains that allows a voter to track their VBM ballot through the mail system and as the VBM ballot is processed by the county elections official.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires a county elections official, upon receiving a VBM ballot, to compare the signature on the VBM ballot return envelope with a signature that is part of the voter's registration record, as specified. (Elections Code §3019(a)(1))
- 2) Provides that if the elections official determines that the signature on a VBM ballot return envelope possesses multiple, significant, and obvious differing characteristics when compared to all signatures in the voter's registration record, the signature is subject to additional procedures that provide that a signature shall be rejected only if two additional elections officials each find beyond a reasonable doubt that the signature differs in multiple, significant, and obvious respects from all signatures in the voter's registration record. (Elections Code §3019(c))
- 3) Requires, in the case of a VBM ballot identification envelope that was not signed by the voter, or in the case of an identification envelope that was signed but where the signature on the envelope did not compare to the signatures on file for the voter as detailed above in 1), that the voter be sent a signature cure form to verify under penalty of perjury that the voter completed and returned the VBM ballot in question. Provides that a voter's VBM ballot shall not be rejected if the voter submits a signature cure form by 5 p.m. on the day of the applicable receipt deadline and the signature on that form compares to a signature in the voter's registration record, as specified. (Elections Code §§3019(d), (e), (f))
- 4) Permits a voter to submit their completed statement by email or facsimile transmission to their local elections official, or by other electronic means made available by the local elections official. (Elections Code §3019(d))
- 5) Requires a local elections official offering other electronic means for submission of a signature verification or unsigned VBM envelope statement to establish appropriate privacy and security protocols that ensure that the information transmitted is received directly and securely by the elections official and is only used for the stated purposes of verifying the signature on the voter's ballot. (Elections Code §3019(g))
- 6) Requires a county elections official to establish a free access system that allows a voter to learn if the their VBM ballot was counted and, if not, the reason why the ballot was not counted. (Elections Code §3019.5)
- 7) Requires the SOS to maintain a system that allows a voter to track their VBM ballot through the mail system and as the VBM ballot is processed by the county elections official (this system is known as BallotTrax). Requires a county elections official to use this system unless the county makes available to voters a different VBM ballot tracking system that meets or exceeds the level of service provided by the SOS's system. (Elections Code §3019.7)
- 8) Requires an elections official to identify and provide to the SOS within 31 days of the election the number of VBM ballots rejected, categorized according to the reason for the rejection. Requires the SOS to provide uniform VBM ballot rejection reason codes for each category of rejection to be used by elections officials for reporting. Requires the SOS to publish a report containing the information for every statewide election on the SOS's

website, as specified. (Elections Code §15377)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

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

In our last general election in November 2024, over 69% of rejected vote-by-mail ballots were for either a missing or non-matching signature. That amounted to nearly 85,000 ballots. Current law provides that if there is a missing or non-matching signature on the vote-by-mail ballot envelope, our elections officials notify the voter of the problem and how to correct the issue. In response to my AB 1037 from 2023, several counties have chosen to offer voters mobile curing as a secure, effective, and voter-friendly option to correct a missing or non-matching signature. Unfortunately, far too many curable ballots are still not corrected. Accordingly, AB 2604 would simply provide for statewide adoption of mobile ballot curing, thereby making it more likely that eligible ballots are counted and less likely that voters are disenfranchised.

2) **VBM Signature Curing and Previous Legislation:** Under California law, a VBM ballot must be verified by the elections official before it can be counted. That verification includes a comparison of the signature on the VBM ballot return envelope with the signatures that are part of the voter's registration record to confirm that the voter who was issued the VBM ballot is the voter who completed and returned the ballot.

It is not uncommon for a VBM ballot to be returned in an envelope that is missing the voter's signature or with a signature that doesn't compare to signatures in the voter's record. At the November 2024 statewide general election, for instance, more than 71,000 VBM ballots that were returned by voters to elections officials were unable to be counted because the signature on the return envelope did not compare to the signatures on file, and more than 13,000 VBM ballots were rejected because the return envelope was not signed by the voter. In the last several years, the Legislature has taken a number of steps to reduce the number of VBM ballots that are rejected for these reasons.

Notably, AB 477 (Mullin), Chapter 726, Statutes of 2015, and SB 759 (McGuire), Chapter 446, Statutes of 2018, created processes for a voter to verify their VBM ballot if the voter failed to sign the VBM ballot return envelope, or if the signature on that envelope did not compare to the signatures in the voter's registration record. These processes are commonly referred to as "cure processes," and the forms used by voters to verify their ballots as a part of these processes are commonly referred to as "signature cure forms."

Last session, AB 3184 (Berman), Chapter 437, Statutes of 2024, made various changes to the signature cure process in an effort to minimize the number of VBM ballots that are unable to be counted. Some of the changes made by AB 3184 were permanent, while others were in effect only for the November 2024 statewide general election.

Last year, SB 3 (Cervantes), Chapter 307, Statutes of 2025, made various changes to state law governing the process for verifying signatures on VBM ballot return envelopes. SB 3, among other provisions, requires the SOS to post a uniform signature cure form and instructions on its website, prohibits a county elections official from accepting signature cure forms that were not developed by the SOS or an elections official, and requires an elections official to use the signature from a completed signature cure form to update the voter's registration record for use in future elections, including updating the signature database.

AB 827 (Berman), Chapter 279, Statutes of 2025, made changes to the procedures for processing VBM ballots with a signature issue and modified deadlines allowing voters to submit a their signature cure forms, among other provisions. Specifically, AB 827 requires a voter be given until the 22nd day after each regularly scheduled statewide election to submit a VBM ballot signature cure form in order to resolve specified issues with their VBM ballots.

- 3) **Signature Cure Form Return Method and Previous Legislation:** Under existing law, a voter may submit their signature cure form by mail, in person, via a ballot dropbox, a voting location, email, or fax. Additionally, in an effort to modernize the process, AB 1037 (Berman), Chapter 673, Statutes of 2023, permits a voter to return a completed signature cure form by electronic means, if such means are made available by the elections official, as specified.

Some counties have implemented an electronic signature cure process that allows a voter to cure their ballot using a text platform, also known as a text-message-based system or a text to cure system. Voters sign on the screen of their phone or tablet and submit it using a secure platform. The Contra Costa County Registrar of Voters implemented a text message signature cure process during 2024 primary election. According to the Contra Costa Registrar, they found significant benefits, particularly in the second year of implementation. In the 2025 statewide special election, the Contra Costa sent 3,643 cure letters for nonmatching signatures and voters cured 971 signatures, including 284 using Text to Cure and 58 using email (with the remainder by mail). They received feedback that this option was particularly appealing for younger voters, and an important benefit since 18-24 year-old voters make up the largest demographic in the county whose signatures are challenged and can be cured.

According to the county elections officials, nine counties provide some text-based-message service for a voter to cure their ballot.

- 4) **Other States and Signature Cure Processes:** According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, approximately 33 states require election officials to notify voters when there is a missing signature or a signature discrepancy on a voter's VBM ballot return envelope, and allow voters to correct the error through a process called curing. Some states are employing available technologies to help voters cure their ballots.

Notably, Nevada and Colorado adopted an electronic signature cure process, also known as "text to cure" or "TXT2Cure," that allows a voter the option to cure their ballot expeditiously through electronic means. Any voter who has a signature discrepancy is sent a cure notification from their county clerk that includes an affidavit with instructions on how they

can return the signed paper affidavit with a photocopy of an acceptable form of identification to their county election office or instructions for voters to use the TXT2Cure system.

Generally, to use a TXT2Cure system, a voter will be provided a link and identification information on the cure letter to login and submit their signature via their smartphone. For example, in order for a Colorado voter to electronically cure their signature they must: 1) Text "Colorado" to 2VOTE (28683) and click on the link provided; 2) Enter their voter ID number and affirm they returned a ballot; 3) Sign an affidavit on their phone and take a photo of an acceptable form of ID, and 4) Submit the information electronically to their county clerk.

Both Colorado and Nevada have been offering the TXT2Cure systems since 2020. According to the Colorado SOS's office, the TXT2Cure system is designed to reduce the number of ballots rejected due to missing or discrepant signatures, and is especially geared for younger voters who statistically have more ballots with signature discrepancies. Typically, younger voters have fewer signatures on file, and have signatures that are evolving. Through leveraging technology familiar to young people, TXT2Cure helps make sure these younger voters have their ballots counted. Additionally, voters may be more inclined to quickly go online and submit their signature, as opposed to mailing, faxing, or emailing the signed cure letter.

- 5) **Statewide System:** Although this bill *requires* the SOS to establish a statewide text-message-based ballot curing system or provide resources for counties to develop their own system, it *does not* require a county elections officials to use either the statewide system or those resources. As a result, implementation may be inconsistent across the state.

Conversely, while a statewide text-message-based ballot curing system could theoretically help prevent eligible ballots from going uncounted—particularly in counties that choose to use it—making participation optional allows county elections officials to determine what best fits the needs and capacities of their local communities.

- 6) **Data:** In every election, a small share of VBM ballots are rejected and not counted due to a variety of reasons, including being received late and signature issues. Research conducted by the University of Southern California's Center for Inclusive Democracy, found that in the 2024 general election, 0.9% (117,586 ballots) of the VBM ballots cast (13,065,070) were rejected, lower than the rejection rate seen in 2022 (1.2%). Notably, the report states that VBM ballot rejection rates were highest among young voters aged 18 to 24, Latino voters, and registered no party preference voters. The most common reason for VBM ballot rejection was being received late, although Latino voters, young voters, and Republican voters had higher rates of signature issues.

According to the report, VBM ballot rejection rates decreased as age increased, with youth voters having by far the largest VBM ballot rejection rate. Around 3.3% of VBM ballots cast by voters aged 18 to 24 were rejected, 1.6 percentage points higher than those aged 25 to 34 (1.7%). The latter age group had the second highest rejection rate. VBM ballot rejection rates decreased as age increased, with voters aged 65 and over having a rejection rate (0.3%), around one-tenth of the youth rejection rate. Moreover, non-matching signature issues were

more common among young voters than their older counterparts. Nearly 73% of rejected VBM ballots cast by those aged 18 to 24 had non-matching signatures, notably more than any other age group.

- 7) **Ballot Tracking:** AB 2218 (Berman), Chapter 432, Statutes of 2018, required the SOS to establish a system that allows voters to track and receive information about their VBM ballots as they move through the mail system and are processed by county elections officials. Voters can sign-up to use California's system, commonly known as BallotTrax, at WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov. The BallotTrax system can provide information via text message or email to a voter who has signed up for the tracking service.

This bill allows the text-message-based ballot curing system to be incorporated into the statewide BallotTrax system or a county's local ballot tracking system. Allowing a county to incorporate a text-message ballot curing process into an existing ballot tracking system may allow a county to more efficiently implement a text-message-based system.

- 8) **Arguments in Support:** In support, the sponsors of this bill, California Voter Foundation and Protect Democracy United, write:

As documented by the Secretary of State, a significant share of rejected vote-by-mail ballots results from missing or non-matching signatures—comprising nearly half of all rejections in the November 2022 election and more than two-thirds in the November 2024 election. These preventable errors disproportionately affect voters who otherwise fully comply with all voting requirements. AB 2604 addresses this challenge by facilitating statewide adoption of mobile ballot curing, allowing voters to quickly and securely resolve signature issues through a text-message-based system.

Several counties have already demonstrated that mobile curing is an effective, secure, and voter-friendly tool. AB 2604 would build on that success by enabling the Secretary of State to implement or support a uniform statewide system, improving cure rates and reducing the number of ballots that go uncounted.

In recent elections, tens of thousands of ballots have gone uncounted due to missing or mismatched signatures... These ballot rejections disproportionately impact young voters and first-time voters. Research conducted by the Center for Inclusive Democracy found that voters aged 18-24 were three times more likely to have their mail ballots rejected than voters overall, with nonmatching signatures the top reason for rejection among this age group.

Providing a mobile ballot curing solution allows young California voters to use technology that they are already familiar with to cure their ballot. In addition to the enfranchisement benefits of this process, it is significantly more cost-effective to implement a solution statewide than the current county-by-county approach, based on information from leading companies that offer these services.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Voter Foundation (Co-sponsor)

Protect Democracy United (Co-sponsor)

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

Campaign Legal Center

CFT

Disability Rights California

Human Rights First

NextGen California

SEIU California

Verified Voting

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Nichole Becker / ELECTIONS / (916) 319-2094