

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS
Gail Pellerin, Chair
SB 1420 (Richardson) – As Amended May 14, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 39-0

SUBJECT: Vote by mail ballots and early voting.

SUMMARY: Requires the Secretary of State (SOS) to develop regulations setting forth procedures that allow a person to cast their vote by mail (VBM) ballot in-person without the VBM ballot identification envelope. Requires the SOS to include information about voting in person without a VBM envelope and early voting procedures in the state voter information guide (VIG). Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Requires the SOS to promulgate regulations setting forth procedures that a county elections official shall follow to allow a person to cast their VBM ballot in person without the VBM ballot identification envelope. Requires these procedures to include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - a) Procedures to check in a voter at a polling location.
 - b) Procedures to verify that the voter's VBM ballot is the correct ballot.
 - c) Procedures to ensure the secrecy of the voter's ballot.
 - d) Procedures to ensure that a voter does not submit more than one VBM ballot without the identification envelope.
- 2) Requires the SOS, in promulgating the regulations in #1, to take into consideration different voting technologies and systems used in counties, and to consult with county registrars of voters and other election stakeholders.
- 3) Requires counties and the SOS, in preparing voter education and outreach plans and the templates for those plans to identify and register qualified electors, to include information about opportunities for early voting and for casting a VBM ballot in-person without the VBM ballot identification envelope.
- 4) Requires the SOS to post the regulations required by this bill on its internet website.
- 5) Requires the state VIG to include the following:
 - a) An explanation of a voter's right to vote their VBM ballot in either of the following manners:

- i) No later than 29 days before the day of the election, at the office of the elections official or a satellite location, pursuant to existing law.
 - ii) Without a VBM ballot identification envelope, in person at the office of the elections official, a satellite location, the polling place designated for the voter's home precinct, or a vote center pursuant to existing law.
 - b) A notice explaining that, for a statewide election, a non-Voter's Choice Act (VCA) county must provide at least one early voting location on the Saturday before the day of the election that is open for a minimum of six hours.
- 6) Contains an urgency clause, allowing this bill to take effect immediately upon enactment. Specifies that the need for the urgency clause is to allow information to be incorporated into the state VIG before the next statewide general election on November 3, 2026.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires an elections official to mail a ballot to every active registered voter for every election in which the voter is eligible to participate. Requires the elections official to begin mailing VBM ballots not later than 29 days before the election, as specified. (Elections Code §§3000.5, 3001, 3010)
- 2) Permits a person to cast their VBM ballot, without the identification envelope, in person at the office of the county elections official, a satellite location, the polling place designated for the voter's home precinct, or a vote center, if all the following conditions are met:
 - a) The county elections official or their staff has real-time access to the county elections official's election management system, and does both of the following:
 - i) Verifies that the voter has not returned a VBM ballot for that election.
 - ii) Changes the status of the voter in the election management system from a VBM voter to an in-person voter.
 - b) After the voter's status has been changed, the voter provides their name, address, and signature pursuant to existing law.
 - c) The county elections official has established procedures to ensure that a voter who casts a ballot does not submit more than one VBM ballot without the identification envelope, and the precinct board or vote center election board complies with those procedures. (Elections Code §3016.5(a))
- 3) Requires a ballot cast pursuant #2 to be processed and counted in the same manner as a nonprovisional ballot cast in person at the polling place or vote center. (Elections Code §3016.5(b))

- 4) Permits, no later than 29 days before the day of the election, any voter using a VBM ballot to, prior to the close of the polls on election day, vote the ballot at the office of the elections official or a satellite location. Requires a non-VCA county, for a statewide election, to provide at least one early voting location on the Saturday before the day of the election that is open for a minimum of six hours, and permits a voter to vote their VBM ballot in person without the VBM ballot identification envelope. (Elections Code §3016.3(c)(1)(B))
- 5) Requires an elections official, upon receiving a VBM ballot, to compare the signature on the identification envelope to determine if the signatures compare, as specified. (Elections Code §3019(a)) Requires an elections official who determines that the signature on a VBM ballot identification envelope compares to a signature in the voter's registration record to deposit the ballot, still in the identification envelope, in a ballot container in the official's office. (Elections Code §3019(b))
- 6) Requires the SOS to prepare and provide a state VIG to every registered voter that contains information about the upcoming statewide election, such as information regarding each state ballot measure, specified candidate information, and the rights of voters. (Elections Code §§9081, 9082.7)
- 7) Requires a person who desires to vote in person at an in-person voting location to provide the person's name and address. Requires the person, upon the precinct officers finding the name in the roster, to sign the person's name in the space provided or, if the voter is unable to sign, to have the voter's name signed by another person on the roster provided for that purpose. (Elections Code §14216)
- 8) Requires a non-VCA county to design and implement a voter education and outreach plan to identify and register qualified electors who are not registered to vote and to encourage participation in the electoral process. Requires each voter education and outreach plan, at a minimum, to provide information to the public about online voter registration, preregistration opportunities, VBM procedures, ballot tracking services, options for military and overseas voters, options for voters with disabilities, options for in-person voting opportunities, language accessibility, and key election dates and deadlines. Requires the SOS to provide county elections officials a template for their voter education and outreach plans and requires the plans to be available on the SOS and county elections officials' internet websites. (Elections Code §2105)
- 9) Authorizes any county, pursuant to the VCA, to conduct elections in which every registered voter is mailed a ballot and vote centers and ballot drop-off locations are available prior to and on Election Day, in lieu of operating polling places for the election, subject to certain conditions. Provides a number of planning and outreach requirements for counties adopting and conducting elections pursuant to the VCA, as specified. (Elections Code §4005)

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- SOS would incur a one-time cost of \$55,000 to promulgate regulations (General Fund). Additionally, SOS indicates that any costs related to the VIG would be minor.

- The California Association of County Elections Clerks indicates that any costs from resulting from the mandate in the bill would be minor and absorbable.

COMMENTS:

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

The long delays in calling the results of elections in California leave candidates and voters unsure of important outcomes and open our state up to bad-faith attacks by election deniers. Recent legislation has created several new voting options that will help speed up how long it takes to process ballots, with the adoption of accepting mail-in ballots at physical voting locations, as implemented by AB 626 (2023), in Placer County improving processing time by three to four days. However, widespread adoption of this new voting method has remained slow and fragmented across California. By increasing voters' awareness of new voting methods and creating statewide guidelines to address implementation and security, California can quickly expand its use of these new voting options and better address the long delays that surround our elections.

2) **Voter's Choice Act and Previous Legislation:** In 2016, the Legislature passed and Governor Brown signed SB 450 (Allen), Chapter 832, Statutes of 2016, which established the VCA and provided a new model for counties to administer elections. This election model was based off of a Colorado election model where every registered voter is mailed a ballot and may visit any voting location, known as a vote center, within the voter's county prior to and on Election Day to vote or seek assistance with voting.

Following the enactment of SB 450, five counties elected to change their election model to the VCA for the 2018 elections. In 2020, 10 counties made the switch and in 2022, 12 more counties opted to conduct their elections using the VCA model. For the November 5, 2024, statewide presidential general election, 29 counties conducted their elections using the VCA model. The remaining 29 counties are non-VCA counties, also referred to as traditional polling place counties.

3) **Previous Legislation:** Last session, AB 626 (Pellerin), Chapter 661, Statutes of 2023, was signed into law and permits a voter to return their VBM ballot, without the identification envelope, in person at the polling place designated for the voter's home precinct or at a vote center, if the election board has real-time access to the county elections official's election management system to verify that the voter has not returned a VBM ballot for that election and changes the status of the voter in the system from a VBM voter to an in-person voter. After the voter's status has been changed, the voter must provide their name and address and sign the roster for the voting location, and a county elections official must establish procedures to ensure that a voter who casts a ballot does not submit more than one VBM ballot without the identification envelope.

AB 1249 (Wilson), Chapter 296, Statutes of 2025, expands on AB 626 and requires a non-VCA county to provide at least one early voting location on the Saturday before a statewide

election that is open for at least six hours, and requires that location to permit a voter to return their VBM ballot in person without the identification envelope.

- 4) **Placer County:** “Sign, Scan & Go” is Placer County’s implementation of AB 626. Placer County first offered the voting method to voters during the 2024 statewide primary and general elections. According to Placer County, voters in the county appreciated the experience of seeing their ballot scanned in front of them, rather than waiting for days to know that it was accepted and this solution saved each voter approximately 7 minutes at the vote center, compared to traditional in-person voting. Additionally, Placer County stated that the process helped voters avoid issues that might otherwise require later signature curing. It also immediately flagged mismarked ballots, preventing overvoting and reducing the need for election staff to remake ballots due to stray marks. Moreover, this program saved roughly 3.5 days of post-election counting process for the county in November 2024 because these ballots could be processed quickly and included in the Election Day count, rather than being processed later as VBM ballots. The following data from Placer County shows that many voters have utilized this option:

- In March 2024, 55% of in-person voters used Sign, Scan & Go (constituting 6% of all voters).
- In November 2024, 65% of in-person voters used it (14% of all voters).
- In November 2025, 61% of in-person voters used it.

According to the author and sponsor, approximately 30 counties allow a person to cast their VBM ballot in-person without the identification envelope. It is unclear, however, how widely available throughout the county this option is offered as a county must have real-time access to their election management system in order to verify that a voter has not already returned their ballot. Due to this condition, it may be more feasible for a VCA county to implement this process as they are already linked to their county’s voter database in real-time. A non-VCA county may only offer this voting option at their elections office, unless their polling places are equipped with technology, such as e-pollbooks, to verify a voter’s status in real time.

The author contends that widespread adoption of this new voting option has remained slow and increased awareness is needed. Others argue that this option is already offered where feasible and requiring the SOS to develop regulations will not necessarily increase its usage.

- 5) **Vote by Mail Usage in California:** Californians have increasingly relied on VBM ballots to cast a vote. According to the SOS’s office, the 1962 general election saw 2.63% of California voters vote by mail. For the 2024 statewide presidential general election, 80.76% of California voters voted by mail, and in the 2025 statewide special election, 88.89% of California voters voted by mail. This increase in mail voting over the past 60 years is a result of many factors ranging from legislation expanding access to VBM ballots, paid postage on return envelopes, and additional elected offices resulting in longer, sometimes more complicated, and time-consuming ballots

- 6) **Suggested Amendments:** Committee staff recommends the following technical amendments to clarify the bill's intent:

On page 2, lines 7-8, strike out "Sections 3016.3 and 3016.5" and insert: "subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (c) of Section 3016.3 and Section 3016.5."

On page 5, in line 7, delete "Section 3016.3" and insert "Section 3016.5"

- 7) **Arguments in Support:** In support of this bill, the League of Women Voters of California, writes:

This voting method offers clear benefits for both voters and election administrators. It can reduce ballot rejection by allowing voters to return their vote-by-mail ballots in person without going through the envelope-based signature verification process that causes thousands of ballots to go uncounted each election cycle, often disproportionately affecting younger and first-time voters. In counties where voters scan their ballots on site, it can also help voters catch and correct mistakes such as overvotes before the ballot is cast. It can also improve efficiency by reducing envelope processing, signature review, and ballot remakes, helping speed ballot counting after Election Day.

SB 1420 addresses the public education side of these reforms. It requires the Secretary of State to adopt statewide regulations guiding county voter education and outreach on these options, and it ensures that voters receive information about them through the official State Voter Information Guide, including notice of Saturday early voting in counties that are required to provide it for statewide elections. New voting options are only useful if voters know they exist and understand how to use them.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Voter Foundation (Co-Sponsor)
Protect Democracy United (Co-Sponsor)
California Association of Clerks & Election Officials
California-Hawaii State Conference of the NAACP
Campaign Legal Center
CPCA Advocates, Subsidiary of the California Primary Care Association
Human Rights First
League of Women Voters of California
Nextgen California
Responsive Gov Action
Verified Voting

Opposition

None on file.

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