

Date of Hearing: April 26, 2017

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS AND REDISTRICTING

Marc Berman, Chair

AB 1407 (McCarty) – As Amended April 3, 2017

**SUBJECT:** California New Motor Voter Program: voter registration.

**SUMMARY:** Provides for every person who is applying for a driver's license or state identification card and who is eligible to preregister to vote to be automatically preregistered to vote, unless that person opts out. Makes corresponding changes.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Requires, pursuant to the California New Motor Voter Program, that each eligible voter be registered to vote by default when he or she submits an application for a driver's license or state identification card, or provides the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) with a change of address, unless the voter specifically declines.
- 2) Permits a person who is at least 16 years old and otherwise meets all voter eligibility requirements to preregister to vote. Provides that the person's voter registration will be deemed effective as soon as the person is 18 years old at the time of the next election.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:**

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

The 2015 California New Motor Voter Program was a huge step in removing barriers to increase voter registration and encouraging civic engagement. Building upon past legislative efforts, AB 1407 would give 16 and 17 year olds the opportunity to pre-register to vote. Voters who are engaged early, are much more likely to become consistent voters and active citizens, something that is vital to the continued success of California.

- 2) **Youth Voter Registration:** According to information from the Secretary of State's website, youth aged 18-24 years old stand out as registering at a far lower rate than any other age group. In the presidential election year of 2016, of the nearly 75% of Californians who were registered to vote, only 12% were youth between the ages of 17.5 to 24. In 2014 only 52 percent of the state's residents ages 18 to 24 were registered to vote before the midterm election. This was more than 20 points below any other age group.

In its report *California's Likely Voters*, the Public Policy Institute of California states that young adults (18 to 34) make up 33% of the population but only 18% of likely voters, while adults ages 35 to 54 are proportionally represented. In contrast, Californians age 55 and older make up 31% of the state's adult population but constitute 47% of likely voters.

- 3) **Automatic Preregistration at the DMV:** According to CALPIRG's report *Path to the Polls: Preregistering California's Youth to Build a More Participatory Democracy* "At the age of

16, California teens first become eligible to obtain a provisional driver's license, which requires a visit to the DMV. This provides a strong incentive for many young people to visit a government agency that has the obligation to provide voter registration opportunities to customers, and that should provide preregistration opportunities as well."

One of the limitations of this approach is that some 16- and 17-year olds will never visit the DMV, either because they do not need to drive or cannot afford a car. For example, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration found that in 2014, only around 866,000 California teenagers had obtained a driver's license by age 19. But in the same year, the Census American Community Survey found there were 2 million U.S. citizen teens aged 16-19 living in California. If this trend continues, only about half of the population that could be eligible to preregister would actually go to the DMV and have the opportunity to do so.

- 4) **Encouraging Civic Engagement:** Studies have shown that preregistering young people to vote before they turn 18 boosts voter turnout and helps turn them into lifelong voters. In their policy brief titled *Voting is a Habit*, the Young Voter Strategies project cites numerous academic studies and electoral analyses which have shown that voting is a learned behavior that is habit-forming. They conclude that encouraging young voters to go to the polls can lead to increased voter participation over their lifetime.

Research published in two articles in the *American Journal of Political Science* in 2015 support using preregistration to encourage long term voting and civic engagement. According to Holbein and Hillygus in "Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout" allowing preregistration can increase young voter turnout by up to 13 percentage points, and people who vote at an early age are more likely to stay engaged and vote in later elections. Results from Gerber *et al*, "Making Young Voters: The Impact of Preregistration on Youth Turnout" show that people who vote once are much more likely to vote again. These two studies suggest that preregistration programs can help set voting patterns for young generations, and could shape the level of democratic participation in a state for decades or longer.

- 5) **Preregistration in Other States:** According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, and Washington D.C. have preregistration for 16 year olds.
- 6) **Previous Legislation:** AB 30 (Price), Chapter 364, Statutes of 2009, allows a person who is 17 years of age to pre-register to vote, provided he or she would otherwise meet all eligibility requirements.

ACA 2 (Mullin) of 2015 would have allowed a person who is 17 years old and who will be 18 years old at the time of the next general election to register and vote in that general election and in any intervening primary or special election that occurs after the person registers to vote. ACA 2 was approved by this committee, but was never brought up for a vote on the Assembly floor.

SB 113 (Jackson), Chapter 619, Statutes of 2014, allows a person who is 16 years of age to pre-register to vote, provided he or she would otherwise meet all eligibility requirements.

AB 1461 (Gonzalez), Chapter 729, Statutes of 2014, provides for every person who has a driver's license or state identification card and who is eligible to register to vote to be automatically registered to vote at the DMV, unless that person opts out.

- 7) **Related Legislation:** ACA 10 (Low), which is pending in this committee, proposes to reduce the minimum voting age and allow a person who is 17 years old and a resident of California to vote.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

Secretary of State Alex Padilla (sponsor)  
CALPIRG  
California Association of Student Councils

**Opposition**

None on file.

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