

Date of Hearing: April 25, 2018

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS AND REDISTRICTING

Marc Berman, Chair

AB 2707 (Mullin) – As Amended April 9, 2018

SUBJECT: Voter information Internet Web site.

SUMMARY: Requires the Governor to establish a voter information Internet Web site that provides voters information on their elected federal, state, and local officials. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Governor, no later than January 1, 2020, through an executive department or agency of his or her choice, to establish a voter information Internet Web site for the purpose of providing a voter with information regarding his or her elected officials.
- 2) Requires the Internet Web site to display the names and contact information, including telephone number, email address, and office address of the following elected officials for the voter:
 - a) United States Senators and Representative in Congress;
 - b) State officers elected on a statewide basis;
 - c) Member of the Senate and Member of the Assembly;
 - d) Elective officers of a city, county, school district, and special district; and,
 - e) Judge elected or reelected to a judicial office.
- 3) Requires the Internet Web site to be accessible to voters in multiple languages, including, but not limited to Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Japanese.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Provides that the supreme executive power of this state is vested in the Governor.
- 2) Provides that the Secretary of State (SOS) is the chief elections officer of the state.
- 3) Requires the SOS to publish and distribute a roster of the State and local public officials of California whenever an appropriation is made by the Legislature for that purpose.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

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

AB 2707 would establish a single online database where voters could locate all contact information for their federal, state, and local elected officials by searching via his or her address. Upon entering an address, a voter will have access to

names, phone numbers, addresses, and email for each of his or her elected representatives. In a state that leads the rest of the nation on technological development and advancement, it seems essential that we provide voters with facilitated online access to such essential information.

Currently, there is no single online database where voters can find out information for all of their representatives. Instead, they must search elections results and call local county officials to confirm, or scour county and city websites to piece together a complete list of representatives. Some voters may consult the California Roster, which is annually published by the Secretary of State, however this pamphlet does not include special districts.

While some counties provide such information to residents, each county is different resulting in unequal access to information across county lines. AB 2707 will create consistent access to elected official contact information.

A single online database will facilitate...civic engagement for all Californians, especially as more have become accustomed to having easily accessible information online. AB 2707 will make civic engagement less arduous, giving Californians a tool to amplify their voices at every level of government.

- 2) **Civic Engagement in the Digital Age:** In their 2013 report “Civic Engagement in the Digital Age” the Pew Research Center reported that people who are well-educated and from a high socioeconomic status are more likely than others to engage in political activities using online resources. The report is based on the findings of a survey on Americans' use of the Internet and found:

Those who live in higher income households and those with higher levels of education (specifically, those who have attended or graduated from college) are consistently more likely than those with lower income or education levels to take part in many of the online and offline civic behaviors we measured in this study. On the other hand, when it comes to the 60% of American adults who use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, political participation is more balanced between lower and higher income Americans.

Furthermore, the study found that only 34% of American adults have recently engaged with or contacted a government official about an issue that is important to them via online methods.

- 3) **Similar Systems Currently In-Use:** Since 2014, the Inyo County Elections Internet Web site has provided a "Your Representative" lookup tool. The lookup tool allows a resident to enter his or her address and be provided with information about elected representatives that represent them. According to the county registrar, their website is one of the highest trafficked websites related to elections. Additionally, the lookup tool is also ADA-compliant, mobile friendly, and does not require the download of a separate application. Similarly, the state of Indiana offers its voters a “Who Are Your Elected Officials” portal that is sponsored by the Indiana Secretary of State and maintained by a private company.

- 4) **Federal Language Requirements:** The 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution provides, in part, "[t]he right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Additionally, the 15th Amendment authorizes Congress to enact legislation to enforce its provisions.

Congress determined that the existing federal anti-discrimination laws were not sufficient to overcome the resistance by state officials to enforce the 15th Amendment. As a result, Congress passed and President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (VRA). The VRA provides, among other provisions, that "[n]o voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge that right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color."

In 1975, Congress adopted the language minority provisions of Sections 4(f)(4) and 203 of the VRA. Congress extended these provisions in 1982, 1992, and 2006. Sections 4(f)(4) and 203 of the VRA require certain jurisdictions with significant populations of voting age citizens who belong to a language minority community to provide voting materials in a language other than English. These determinations are based on data from the most recent Census.

Specifically, Sections 203 and 4(f)(4) require that when a covered state or political subdivision "[p]rovides registration or voting notices, forms, instructions, assistance, or other materials of information relating to the electoral process, including ballots, it shall provide them in the language of the applicable minority group as well as in the English language."

Federal law requires California to provide voting materials in the following nine languages: Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.

- 5) **Previous Legislation:** AB 1004 (Calderon) of 2017, which was similar to this bill except that it would have required the SOS to develop the database of elected officials, passed out of this committee on a 7-0 vote. AB 1004 was vetoed by Governor Brown. In his veto message the Governor stated that the "Secretary of State currently does not have a centralized system in place to track these elected officials. Although well-intentioned, I do not believe this is the time to take on such a task given the other technology projects underway by the Secretary of State's office. Moreover, it is currently possible to learn the identity of office holders by making inquiries of federal, state and local officials."
- 6) **Double-Referral:** At the time this bill was originally referred to policy committee, it was double-referred to the Assembly Privacy and Consumer Protection Committee. Subsequent to that referral, this bill was amended. Based on those amendments, the Assembly Rules Committee has indicated that the bill no longer needs to be heard by the Assembly Privacy and Consumer Protection Committee. Instead, this bill should be reported out to the Assembly Appropriations Committee if it is approved by this committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Clean Money Campaign
Inyo County Registrar of Voters Kammi Foote
YourVoterGuide, Inc.

Opposition

None on file.

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