



# 2018 Election Reform Primer: What Voters Need to Know

October 2018

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*California passed many new election reforms in recent years. 2018 will be the first year these laws are in place for a statewide general election. This Election Reform Primer summarizes key new laws that voters need to know. If implemented successfully, the reforms have the potential to expand participation and modernize elections.*

*Available at [www.futureofcaelections.org/electionprimer2018](http://www.futureofcaelections.org/electionprimer2018)*

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August 2018**

**Table of Contents**

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>1. Overview.....</b>                                      | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>2. Every Vote Counts Act.....</b>                         | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>3. Motor Voter Law.....</b>                               | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>4. Same Day Registration.....</b>                         | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>5. Third Party Return of Voted Ballots.....</b>           | <b>10</b> |
| <b>6. Voter’s Choice Act.....</b>                            | <b>11</b> |
| <b>7. Voter Pre-Registration of 16 and 17-Year-Olds.....</b> | <b>13</b> |

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## An Overview of Selected California Election Laws

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| <b>Every Vote Counts Act</b>               | Voters will be notified if the signature on their vote-by-mail ballot does not match the signature in their voter registration record. Voters will have the opportunity to correct their signature and have their ballot count.  |
| <b>California Motor Voter</b>              | Eligible DMV customers will be registered to vote after affirming their eligibility when applying for or renewing their driver's license or state ID, or updating their address. Individuals who do not wish to register to vote can opt out.  |
| <b>Same Day Voter Registration</b>         | Californians can still register and vote, even when they miss the 15-day voter registration deadline, by visiting their county elections office or designated location up to and through Election Day.   |
| <b>Third Party Return of Voted Ballots</b> | A voter may designate anyone to return their voted ballot. Previously, only a voter's family or household member could return their vote-by-mail ballot for them. Now there are no longer any restrictions on who can return ballots on behalf of voters.  |
| <b>Voter's Choice Act</b>                  | In 2018, voters in <u>Madera, Napa, Nevada, San Mateo and Sacramento</u> counties can choose when, where, and how they vote. Ballots will be mailed to all registered voters before an election. They have the choice of returning the ballot through the mail, at a ballot dropbox, or in-person at a vote center. Vote centers will replace traditional polling places, giving voters the flexibility to vote in person at any location in their county during an 11-day voting period. Voters will also have access to Same Day Voter Registration, accessible voting machines, and language support at Vote centers. All counties will have the option to participate in 2020. |
| <b>Pre-Registration</b>                    | Eligible 16 and 17-year-olds can now pre-register to vote. Their voter registration will become active once they turn 18 years old and can vote.   |

# Every Vote Counts Act

Voters can correct a mismatched signature

## How it Works

The Every Vote Counts Act (SB 759, authored by Senator McGuire) gives voters the right to be notified and to verify their signature when the signature on their vote-by-mail ballot does not match the signature in their voter registration record.

Previously, when a signature did not match, the voted ballot was not counted because the election official was unable to confirm the identity of the voter. The new law requires election officials to notify a voter of the signature mismatch by sending them a letter and Verification Signature Statement. The voter has the opportunity to verify their identity by signing the Verification Signature Statement and have their ballot counted. Voters must verify their signature by the deadline listed in the letter, which is by 5pm two days before the certification of the election.

The bill was passed in September 2018 and is active in the November 6, 2018, General Election and for all future elections.

## What Voters Need to Know

### **Why did I receive a letter from my election office that my signature does not match?**

You received a notice because the signature you signed on your vote-by-mail envelope looked different than the signature in your voter registration record. This may happen if a signature is not recognizable, printed rather than signed, or simply changed over time.

- Read the letter your received carefully and follow the instructions and deadline.
- Take the time to fill out, sign and submit the Verification Signature Statement form sent to you by your election officials. You have several ways to submit your new signature – by mail, email, or in-person at your county election office, vote center or polling place.

### **What signature is on my voter registration record?**

Your voter registration record may hold a few samples of your signature, including the signature you provided when you first registered to vote and the signatures on forms issued by your election official. If you registered to vote online, then it will also include the signature from your state driver's license or identification card.

### **I don't have the same signature anymore. What do I do?**

By signing and submitting the Signature Verification Statement, your election official will have your current signature on file.

**Contact your election office if you have questions or need more information.**

**<https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices/>**

# California Motor Voter

Voter registration is now more convenient when completing specific transactions at the DMV

## Overview

Eligible DMV customers will be able to update an existing voter registration or register or pre-register to vote after affirming their eligibility when completing one of the following transactions through the DMV:

- Driver's license or state ID application
- Driver's license or state ID renewal
- Change of address

Individuals who do not wish to register to vote can opt out.

Individuals completing other DMV transactions, including vehicle registration, will *not* be registered to vote through California Motor Voter. They can register to vote by requesting a paper voter registration form or by visiting [registertovote.ca.gov](http://registertovote.ca.gov).

California Motor Voter makes registering to vote and keeping voter registration up to date more convenient for voters and improves the accuracy of voter rolls, contributing to a smoother election experience.

## How it Works

### The Policy:

The California Motor Voter program requires the DMV to provide a seamless voter registration process for eligible voters who apply for or renew a driver's license or state ID card, or who notify the DMV of a change of address. U.S. citizens who affirm they meet the eligibility requirements will have their voter registration information securely and electronically transferred to the Secretary of State to register them to vote or update their voter registration record, unless they opt out.

### How It Works:

- During the application, renewal, or change of address process, people will be required to affirm they are a U.S. citizen AND meet all of the voter eligibility requirements before their information can be used to register them to vote or update their voter registration.
- Individuals can opt out of voter registration during their transaction.
- DMV now offers a new online driver's license or state ID application online, but customers are still required to visit a DMV office in person to complete their application and their voter registration. Please note that the voter registration deadline is 15 days before an election, so customers who fill out an online application who will not visit the DMV office to complete their transaction before the voter registration deadline should register to vote online at [registertovote.ca.gov](http://registertovote.ca.gov).
- DMV customers who register to vote or update their voter registration through California Motor Voter will be asked to provide their voter registration preferences, including their:

- Party preference
- Vote-by-mail status
- Language for voting materials
- California Motor Voter will *not* automatically add all driver's license and ID holders to the voter rolls. People will only be registered to vote if they confirm their eligibility to vote when they apply for or renew a license or ID, or when they submit a change of address through the DMV.
- Both the DMV's electronic and paper applications have safeguards to ensure only people who are eligible to vote are registered. By law, the information of AB 60 license applicants and license holders will not be transmitted to the Secretary of State.

**Additional Benefits:**

- Eligible 16 and 17-year-olds will be pre-registered to vote at DMV when completing a qualified transaction. They can vote when they turn 18.
- Voter registration information is available in the following 10 languages: English, Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.
- DMV offices will have dedicated accessible computers for customers with disabilities to complete applications and register to vote.

**What Voters Need to Know**

When you apply for or renew a driver's license or state ID, or if you notify DMV of an address change, you will be asked to confirm your eligibility to vote. If you confirm your eligibility, you will be registered to vote or your voter registration will be updated unless you check the opt-out box on the DMV form.

If you are 16 or 17 years old and eligible, you will be pre-registered to vote when applying for a driver's license, state ID, or learner's permit, or if you notify DMV of an address change, unless you check the opt-out box on the DMV form. You will have to wait to vote until you turn 18 before you can vote.

**Voter Registration Eligibility Requirements**

To register to vote in California, you must be:

- a United States citizen, and
- a resident of California, and
- 18 years old or older on Election Day, and
- not currently in state or federal prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony, and
- not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court.

To pre-register to vote in California, you must:

- be 16 or 17 years old, and
- meet all of the other eligibility requirements to vote.

If you have pre-registered to vote, you will automatically be registered to vote on your 18th birthday.

Once your DMV transaction is complete, DMV will send your voter registration information to the Secretary of State. You will get a postcard in the mail that confirms you are registered to vote! You can check your voter registration status at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/registration-status>.

## Important Reminders:

- The voter registration deadline for any election is 15 days before Election Day. If you miss the deadline, you will need to register and vote at your county elections office or designated location. Contact your county elections office for more information.  
<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices>
- By law, the information of AB 60 license applicants and license holders will not be transmitted to the Secretary of State and they will not be registered to vote.
- To pre-register, register, or to update your voter registration, you must complete the voter registration sections during your DMV transaction by affirming that you are a U.S. citizen and that you are eligible to vote. You will also be able to choose a political party, get voting materials in a different language, or become a permanent vote-by-mail voter.
- The voter registration questions are offered to DMV customers in 9 additional languages: Spanish, Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.

# Same Day Voter Registration

Voters can register and vote after the 15-day voter registration deadline

## How it Works

Don't be discouraged if a voter misses the voter registration deadline. Eligible voters can still register and vote on the same day all the way up to and through Election Day!

To register after the deadline, a voter may register by completing the registration form online ([registertovote.ca.gov](http://registertovote.ca.gov)) or by using a paper voter registration card. However, they must visit their county elections office or a designated location to vote.

Same Day Voter Registration, officially known as conditional voter registration, was enacted in 2012 (AB 1436, authored by Assemblymember Mike Feuer) and became effective January 1, 2017, after California certified its statewide voter registration database.

## What Voters Need to Know

You can still register and vote even if you missed the voter registration deadline.

Go to your county Elections Office – up to and through Election Day.

It's 3 simple steps you can complete in 1 visit.

1. You **register** to vote.
2. You **vote**.
3. You **seal** your ballot in a special envelope and **sign** it.

To learn where you can register and vote contact your county Elections Office:

[www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices)

### Important Reminder:

If you register after the deadline, you will only be able to vote at your county elections office or a specially designated location.

To learn where you can register and vote contact your county Elections Office: [www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices)

We strongly recommend that all voters VOTE at the county elections office or designated location where and when they register.

Once you register, you will be registered for future elections.

Votes will be counted once election officials verify your voter registration and confirm that you have not already voted elsewhere. You can check the county website for your ballot status to see if your ballot was counted, and if not, why not. To view your ballot status visit <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-status>



## Same Day Voter Registration Offers Opportunity for Students

In past elections, the registration deadline was a particular barrier for students. Students are often new voters and may not be aware of elections deadlines, or they may move without updating their voter registration. Additionally, some students register to vote at their parent's address and don't receive any voting information at their campus residence.

Same Day Voter Registration solves these problems as long as students know that they must visit the county elections office or a designated location to register to vote and vote.

If you are registering students, contact the county elections office in your county and urge them to create a specially designated location for Same Day Voter Registration near or on campus.

After the 15-day voter registration deadline, be prepared to point unregistered students to the nearest specially designated location. They will not be able to register or vote at a standard polling place.

## Frequently Asked Questions

When is the voter registration deadline?

15 days before election day.

Why does the voter registration deadline matter?

There are several milestones as we get close to Election Day:

- If you register 29 days before the election, you receive your state and county voter guide in the mail with all the information you need to vote.
- If you register 15 days before the election, your name is on the voter list at your polling site and you still have time to vote by mail.
- If you register after the 15th day, you must go to a county elections office or designated location to vote.

Where to check if you are registered to vote?

Visit [voterstatus.sos.ca.gov](http://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov) or call (800) 345-VOTE (8683). You can look up your registration or find your polling place.

If I register to vote and then vote, will my ballot be treated the same as everyone else's?

You will fill out a standard ballot, place it in an envelope, fill out your information, sign it, and submit it. Your ballot will be counted if:

- Your signature on the ballot envelope matches the one on your voter registration form.
- You provide all the information needed to identify you on your voter registration form -- including your name, address of residence, and date of birth.
- This is the only ballot you cast in this election.

## Third Party Return of Voted Ballots

California law has changed to permit anyone to return anyone else's ballot

### How it Works

Californians who cast vote-by-mail ballots can now have anyone return their voted ballots once they place their voted ballot inside the ballot envelope, and seal and sign the envelope.

California lawmakers enacted a law (AB 1921, authored by Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, D-San Diego) that removes restrictions on who can return vote-by-mail ballots on behalf of others.

Under the previous rules, only members of a voter's immediate family or household could return a completed vote-by-mail ballot for them. Under the new rules, there are no restrictions on who can return ballots for others.

A person designated to return a vote by mail ballot is subject to punishment under state law if they knowingly and willingly engage in criminal acts related to that ballot. Additionally, state law prohibits a person from receiving compensation for returning ballots on someone's behalf.

### What Voters Need to Know

1. You have the right to cast a secret ballot and do not have to tell anyone how you voted
2. You should only give your ballot to someone else to turn in if you trust that person
3. You have the right to refuse a request from anyone to turn in your voted ballot

If you have someone else return your ballot envelope, remember to ask that person to print and sign their name on the return section of your envelope. They must also describe their relationship to you.

In 2017, some campaigns sent representatives door-to-door asking voters to give them their voted ballots to turn in on their behalf. Some voters objected to these tactics and filed complaints with election officials. Remember you have the right to refuse anyone offering to collect your ballot.

Check with your county's elections office to find the ballot return locations available in your area.

Find your county elections office contact information here:

<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/county-elections-offices/>

# Voter's Choice Act

Voters choose when, where and how to vote

## How it Works

The Voter's Choice Act or VCA (SB 450, authored by Senator Allen) is designed to make voting more convenient and accessible. As part of the VCA, the following changes will be implemented:

- All voters will receive their ballot by mail.
- Voters can fill out their ballot at home and return it 1) via mail, 2) via a Ballot Dropbox or 3) in-person at **any** Vote Center in their county.
- Voters with disabilities may use their own accessible technology to mark their ballot at home.
- Voters can vote in person at a Vote Center for up to 11 days -- even on the weekends.
- Vote Center staff will be available to provide assistance in multiple languages and to help voters with disabilities.

In 2018, Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento and San Mateo counties will implement the VCA. All counties may choose to participate in the VCA starting in 2020.

## What Voters Need to Know

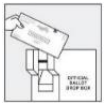
In 2018, **Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento and San Mateo counties** are the only counties conducting their elections under the new Voter's Choice Act model.

Voters have **3 choices** for how to vote.



### VOTE-BY-MAIL

You can mail your ballot as soon as you receive it.



### BALLOT DROPBOX

You can drop off your ballot at any secure Ballot Dropbox as soon as you receive it. No postage is required at Ballot Dropboxes.



### VOTE CENTER

You can vote in person by visiting any Vote Center in your county. All Vote Centers will be open for at least 3 days, starting the Saturday before Election Day and through Election Day. Some Vote Centers will be open for 10 days before the Election and through Election Day.

At every Vote Center you can:

- Vote in person.
- Register and vote the same day, all the way up through Election Day.
- Drop off your completed ballot.
- Vote with an accessible voting machine.
- Get help and voting materials in multiple languages.

## Same Day Voter Registration and the Voter's Choice Act

All Vote Centers offer Same Day Registration and early voting. Voters can visit any Vote Center in their county to register and vote.

## Voter Education Resources

Future of California Elections launched the Voter's Choice California Project to support communities implementing the Voter's Choice Act. There are local implementation hubs in each of the five Voter's Choice Act counties, Madera, Napa, Nevada, Sacramento and San Mateo. Email [vcc@futureofcaelections.org](mailto:vcc@futureofcaelections.org) to get more information.

Visit [VotersChoice.org](http://VotersChoice.org) to access open source voter education resources such as a fact sheet, sample text for materials, a Power Point and translated information.

The Secretary of State's Office developed a short PSA video explaining the Voter's Choice Act. Watch the video at <https://youtu.be/8qfcewXjIQ0>

Additional voter education materials developed by the Office the Secretary of State are available at <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/voters-choice-act/vca-toolkits/>

# Voter Pre-registration for 16 and 17-Year-Olds

Pre-register at 16. Vote at 18.

## How it Works

Eligible 16 and 17-year-olds in California can pre-register to vote today and their registration will become active once they turn 18 years old.

Pre-registration of 16 and 17-year-olds was enacted in 2014 (SB 113, authored by Senator Jackson) and became effective once California certified its statewide voter registration database in September 2016.

## Who is Eligible?

Any 16 or 17-year-old who is:

- A U.S. Citizen and California resident
- Not currently in prison or on parole for a felony conviction
- Not found to be mentally incompetent by a court

## What Voters Need to Know

If you are an eligible 16 or 17-year-old, you have 3 options to pre-register:

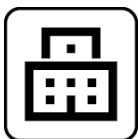


**ONLINE:** Anyone who meets the eligibility requirements can fill out the application online at [www.registertovote.ca.gov/](http://www.registertovote.ca.gov/)

If you have a California driver's license or ID you can submit the form online. If, however, you do not have a driver's license or ID then you will need to print the application, or have your county election official send you a copy, and mail it in.



**BY PAPER:** Pre-registration is available on paper registration forms and can be used by anyone. Applications are available at any county elections office, the DMV, or many other government offices. Contact your county office to have an application mailed to you or call the Secretary of State's toll-free voter hotline at (800) 345-VOTE.



**IN PERSON AT THE DMV:** 16 and 17-year-olds will be pre-registered to vote at the DMV when completing eligible transactions, as part of California's Motor Voter program.

You will receive a postcard confirmation in the mail notifying you that your pre-registration application was received and processed.

## Strategies for Reaching Young People

In our increasingly digital world, it's most effective to reach young people online with clear, actionable resources. Here are a few tips:

- Use social media platforms and leverage authentic messengers to distribute the call-to-action beyond your existing audience.
- Build on the national narratives and connect them to local issues and races with a direct call to pre-register.
- Utilize SMS to connect (i.e. send an SMS to every voter once they turn 18).
- Integrate your efforts into events they're already attending (like a concert!).
- Cultivate an ongoing relationship outside of Election Day.

Visit the California Secretary of State website for additional voter education resources on pre-registration <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/pre-register-16-vote-18/>