



IMPROVING THE VOTING PROCESS TO BETTER SERVE VOTERS

July 25, 2019

Assembly Member Lorena Gonzalez
State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Assembly Bill 681 - SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Gonzalez:

The California Voter Foundation is pleased to support Assembly Bill 681 which, if enacted, will help ensure California voters are able to vote for the Presidential candidate of their choice.

Voting in a presidential primary is a complicated experience for many voters. All other California partisan primary elections are “open” and voters are allowed to vote for any candidate of any party regardless of the party to which one is registered. But when it comes to voting in a Presidential primary, suddenly party affiliation matters and voters’ choices are restricted to just candidates running in their party’s primary.

There is an exception: “independent” voters (who used to be called “decline to state” and are now called “no party preference” voters) can “cross over” and vote in a partisan primary if a party allows it. Historically, the Democratic Party has allowed “crossover” voting for independents, and typically one or two minor parties opt to do so as well.

The number of independent voters in California has grown considerably, and currently stands at 5.6 million - more than one in four registered voters. The number of people casting vote-by-mail ballots has also grown, to 12.4 million - nearly two-thirds of all registered voters. With additional counties implementing the Voter’s Choice Act in 2020, the number of voters automatically sent ballots by mail will increase even further.

In 2008 and 2016, California voters experienced widespread confusion when attempting to cast ballots for the Presidential candidates of their choice. Some thought they were independent but were actually registered with the American Independent Party. Many received ballots in the mail with no presidential candidates on them, failing to respond to an earlier request to state a preference.

AB 681 will address these kinds of problems by requiring all counties to notify all registered voters before Election Day what their registered party preference is, and how they can change it if they wish to do so. This will help voters act early to obtain the ballot of their choice if they vote by mail. AB 681 will also enable voters to simply update their party preference or street address on Election Day at any county government location offering conditional, same-day registration. (CVF also supports SB 72/Umberg which, if enacted, will ensure that conditional voter registration is available at all polling places).

Thank you for authoring this important bill and for building consensus for solutions that will help make next year’s Presidential Primary voting experience a satisfying rather than disappointing one for many California voters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K Alexander".

Kim Alexander
California Voter Foundation