



March 10, 2016

Assembly Member Sebastian Ridley-Thomas
State Capitol, Room 2176
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 2010 - SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Ridley-Thomas:

The California Voter Foundation (CVF) is pleased to support Assembly Bill 2010, which you have introduced, to allow local election officials to accept and publish electronic candidate statements from candidates for local, nonpartisan offices.

This bill, if enacted, will help expand California voters' access to crucial election information by creating an affordable option for local candidates to place candidate statements. Under current law, the only option available to candidates is to submit a statement for inclusion in the printed voter's pamphlet, for which local election officials can and do charge considerable fees in order to defray costs such as staff time, printing and postage. For many local candidates, the price tag for placing an official candidate statement before voters is out of reach, especially for candidates who are running for part-time, volunteer positions and for which they raise little to no campaign funds.

Under existing law, statements from candidates for local, nonpartisan office "include the name, age, and occupation of the candidate and a brief description...of the candidate's education and qualifications expressed by the candidate himself or herself." (Election code section 13307(a)(1)). The absence of candidate statements from local candidates in official election publications deprives voters of the very information they need to make informed choices.

We anticipate that the costs associated with accepting electronic candidate statements and posting them on official local election web sites and in electronic versions of the voter's pamphlet will be considerably less than printed statement costs, thus providing candidates with an affordable way to reach voters and state on the record what they intend to do if elected. We have discussed this reform idea with several county registrars of voters and have received enthusiastic responses from several whom would welcome a more affordable alternative to give to candidates, particularly those running in judicial contests. If enacted AB 2010 will also allow also city clerks who produce voter pamphlets to give candidates an electronic candidate statement option.

The cost of placing a statement countywide in Los Angeles, the state's most populous county and the largest voting jurisdiction in the nation, can rise to as high as \$284,000. In neighboring Orange County, placing a statement countywide could cost as much as \$29,000.

A CVF analysis of Los Angeles County's 2014 Primary election voter's pamphlet found that of the candidates running countywide, only 1 of the 29 Superior Court judicial candidates on the ballot purchased a candidate statement; none of the twelve Assessor candidates had statements, and only four of the seven Sheriff candidates had statements, for a total of 48 candidates with 5 statements among them, or about 10 percent.

A CVF analysis of Shasta County's 2014 General election voter's pamphlet found that there were 63 candidates for all nonpartisan, local offices across the county including city councils, school boards, city clerk and special district contests. Among the 63 candidates, only eight - or about 13 percent - purchased and placed candidate statements. Six of these eight were candidates for Redding City Council (statement fee of \$1,800). Only two of the 39 school board candidates on the ballot placed statements (statement fee ranging from \$300 - \$900) and none of the 12 special district candidates placed statements (\$300-\$500 fee). While these fees are low compared to other jurisdictions, they are relatively high for the candidates running in this rural area of California for voluntary community positions.

By contrast, as your committee staff discovered, in San Francisco, where candidates pay no fees for placing statements, 42 of the 43 candidates who ran for local nonpartisan offices in November 2014 placed candidate statements, providing voters with a bounty of reliable information to use when voting.

It is our hope that by giving candidates a more affordable option for placing statements, more voters statewide will gain access to the most essential information needed when deciding how to vote, which is candidates stating in their own words why they are best qualified to represent us. Candidate statements are not only a key tool to help voters make more informed election choices; they are also an important tool for holding politicians accountable once elected to office. As voters increasingly turn to the Internet and their smartphones to access election information, AB 2010 will be an important step to ensure they will find what they need when they look for it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kim Alexander', written in a cursive style.

Kim Alexander
President & Founder