



April 7, 2015

The Honorable Kevin Mullin
State Capitol, Room 3160
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 477 - SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Mullin:

The California Voter Foundation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to improving the voting process to better serve voters, is pleased to support your bill, AB 477, which, if enacted, will allow voters who forget to sign their vote-by-mail ballots to submit their signature after their ballots have been cast so that their ballots will be able to be counted.

Casting vote-by-mail ballots has become an increasingly popular method of voting among Californians. But with its rising popularity has come a growing number of problems. Every election, tens of thousands of VBM ballots go uncounted in California, primarily due to three reasons: they arrive too late; the ballot envelope has not been signed, or the signature on the envelope is found to not sufficiently compare to the voter's signature on file. According to the Pew Charitable Trusts, California's mail ballot rejection rate is among the highest of all the states in the nation.

Last year CVF published a first-of-its-kind, in-depth study of three counties' vote-by-mail programs, identifying differences between these programs and recommending improvements that can be implemented so that more mail ballots that are cast can be counted. Our study found that in two counties – Sacramento and Orange – when voters fail to sign their VBM envelope, the voter is contacted and urged to come to the election office and sign the envelope there. In the third county studied – Santa Cruz – ballots that lack a signature are mailed back to the voter to be signed and re-submitted, creating some confusion as to whether new postage needs to be affixed to the VBM envelope.

By providing an additional method for county registrars to collect a VBM voter's missing signature, your bill will help increase the VBM ballot success rate. Research conducted by Mindy Romero of the California Civic Engagement Project at UC Davis last year found that, among the 52 of 58 counties that provided data, unsigned ballot envelopes accounted for 16.2 percent of VBM ballots cast that were rejected in November 2012. The Secretary of State's office reported overall that 69,000 VBM ballots statewide were rejected; given Ms.

Romero's findings, it can be estimated that approximately 11,200 ballots cast were not counted in November 2012 due to missing signatures.

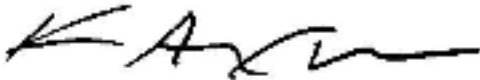
Ms. Romero's research also revealed that counties undertake a variety of methods in attempting to help voters correct problem VBM ballots. Most counties - 93 percent - say they contact voters by phone while 70 percent say they contact voters by mail, and 63 percent attempt to contact by email. However, since providing a phone number and email address is optional on California's voter registration card, this contact information is frequently not available to election officials, leaving mail as the only option.

Ms. Romero's research also estimates that a little over half of the counties mail unsigned ballots back to voters. If counties are able to instead mail an "Unsigned Ballot Statement" form to voters, it will save both the county and voters the additional ballot postage costs, reduce the risk of the returned ballot not getting signed and re-mailed by the voter in time to be counted, and keep the ballot in the safe possession of the registrar until the signature arrives and can be attached.

At a time of record low voter turnout, we need to do more to ensure those who do cast ballots will have their votes counted. AB 477, if enacted and implemented by counties, will reduce, perhaps by thousands, the number mail ballots cast that go uncounted and help increase voter turnout.

Thank you for introducing this important bill. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 916-441-2494 or at kimalex@calvoter.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K Alexander". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kim Alexander
President