

Elections Observation Rights and Responsibilities – November 2018

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Overview

The following is an easy-to-use overview for elections officials and anyone who wants to observe the conduct of elections in California. This overview does not have the force and effect of law, regulation or rule, may not be used as legal advice, and is not a substitute for legal counsel for an individual or organization. The California Elections Code sections relevant to election observation are included for reference. Some of the rules included below were drawn from the Secretary of State's General Rules for Observers as established in the Election Observer Panel Plan Template.

Five California counties are conducting their 2018 elections under the California Voter's Choice Act (VCA). Pursuant to the VCA, starting 10 days before the election and through the Friday before Election Day, one vote center is required for every 50,000 registered voters. On Election Day and the Saturday, Sunday, and Monday leading up to Election Day, one vote center is required for every 10,000 registered voters. The information contained in this overview applies to vote centers, just as it does to the polling places located in the counties not conducting elections under the VCA.

Elections observers should be aware that in general, the law provides elections officials with some discretion in terms of how various observation laws are applied. Furthermore, how a law is applied will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction for reasons including, but not limited to:

- ❑ The size and configuration of the elections office.
- ❑ The staffing levels that the county elections official is able to afford.
- ❑ The number of observers who are requesting access to a particular process.

Observers have the right to:

- Observe pre-Election Day activities, as permitted by law, such as voting equipment preparation and testing and vote-by-mail ballot processing.
- Observe the proceedings at polling places, including the opening and closing procedures.
- Obtain information from the voter list that is posted or otherwise available at of the polling place.
- Make notes and watch election procedures.
- View election-related activities at the central counting site on Election Day.
- View the canvass of the vote activities following the election.
- View vote-by-mail and provisional ballot processing.
- Ask questions of poll workers as long as they do not interfere with the conduct of any part of the voting process.
- Ask questions of supervisors at the central counting site as long as they do not interfere with the conduct of the election procedures.

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Elections officials have the right to:

- Use discretion in determining a sufficiently close distance for observers to stand from the process they want to observe.
- Require observers to be quiet inside the observation area.
- Use discretion to determine how (e.g., written or verbal) and to whom observers may pose questions and challenges during the observation process.
- Ask an observer who does not follow observation rules to leave the premises.
- Restrict the number of observers permitted in a room to prevent interference with the observed process.
- Restrict the items observers may bring with them into the polling place or central counting site, such as cell phones, large bags, or back packs, etc.

Observers are responsible for:

- Checking in at each site, whether the polling place or central counting site.
- Wearing an identification badge.
- Maintaining a professional manner while observing the election process.
- Ensuring they do not interfere with the election process.
- Following established county observation rules/policies.

Elections officials are responsible for:

- Maintaining the integrity of the administration of the election and determining observer misconduct or interference.
- Establishing security rules for public observation. Examples of such rules are the use of sign-in sheets and identification badges and prohibiting the use of cell phones, pagers, cameras, and other audio or video equipment or electronic devices.
- Providing notice to the public of the dates, times, and places of election-related activities that may be observed by the public, as required by law. For example, elections officials are required to provide 48 hours notice for vote-by-mail (VBM) ballot processing and five days notice of the post-election one percent manual tally.

Observers may not:

- Interfere with the conduct of the election. The elections official is entitled to determine whether a person is interfering with the conduct of the election.
- Physically handle any voting materials or equipment without the express permission of the elections official.
- Move or rearrange tables, chairs, or voting booths at the polling place or central counting facility.
- Sit at the official worktables or view confidential voter information on any computer terminal or document.

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- Communicate with voters within 100 feet of the entrance to, or inside of, a polling place, a vote center, an elections official's office, or a satellite location by encouraging them to vote for or against a person or a measure or regarding the voter's qualifications to vote. Exit polling of voters is permitted, provided it is conducted at least 25 feet away from the entrance to the polling place.
- Directly challenge a voter. Only a member of a precinct board may do so, based on evidence presented.
- Display any campaign material or wear campaign badges, buttons or apparel.
- Wear the uniform of a peace officer, a private guard, or security personnel.
- Use cellular phones, pagers, or two-way radios inside the polling place and/or within 100 feet of the entrance to the polling place.
- Talk to or attempt to stop poll workers or the central counting site workers while they are processing ballots.
- Use the telephones, computers, or other polling place facilities at polling places or the central counting site.
- Touch election personnel.
- Eat or drink in a polling place or the central counting site.
- Assist in operations at any polling place or the central counting site.
- Prevent other observers from observing materials or a process.
- Enter secure areas without express permission of the elections official.

Elections officials may not:

- Delay or interrupt scheduled operations and processes because an observer is present.

Voter Challenge Procedures

- A challenge to a voter's eligibility may only be made by a member of the precinct board.
- Prior to making a challenge, the member of the precinct board should contact the county elections official for guidance and assistance.
- If a challenge is resolved in favor of the voter, the voter must be allowed to cast a regular ballot.
- If the challenge is not resolved or is resolved against the voter, the voter must be allowed to vote a provisional ballot, even if the challenged voter cannot or will not take the necessary oath.
- All challenges must be documented by the precinct board.

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Pre-Election Day

Voting Equipment Preparation and Testing

Elections Code section 15004

(a) Each qualified political party may employ, and may have present at the central counting place or places, not more than two representatives to check and review the preparation and operation of the tabulating devices, their programming and testing, and have the representatives in attendance at any or all phases of the election.

(b) Any bona fide association of citizens or a media organization may employ, and may have present at the central counting place or places, not more than two representatives to check and review the preparation and operation of the tabulating devices, their programming and testing, and have the representatives in attendance at any or all phases of the election.

(c) The county elections official may limit the total number of representatives employed pursuant to subdivision (b) in attendance to no more than 10 by a manner in which each interested bona fide association of citizens or media organization has an equal opportunity to participate. Any representatives employed and in attendance pursuant to subdivision (a) shall not be subject to the limit specified in this subdivision.

Vote-by-Mail Ballot Processing

Elections Code section 15104

(a) The processing of vote by mail ballot return envelopes, and the processing and counting of vote by mail ballots, shall be open to the public, both prior to and after the election.

(b) A member of the county grand jury, and at least one member each of the Republican county central committee, the Democratic county central committee, and of any other party with a candidate on the ballot, and any other interested organization, shall be permitted to observe and challenge the manner in which the vote by mail ballots are handled, from the processing of vote by mail ballot return envelopes through the counting and disposition of the ballots.

(c) The elections official shall notify vote by mail voter observers and the public at least 48 hours in advance of the dates, times, and places where vote by mail ballots will be processed and counted.

(d) Notwithstanding paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) of Section 2194, vote by mail voter observers shall be allowed sufficiently close access to enable them to observe the vote by mail ballot return envelopes and the signatures thereon and challenge whether those individuals handling vote by mail ballots are following established procedures, including all of the following:

(1) Verifying signatures and addresses on the vote by mail ballot return envelopes by comparing them to voter registration information.

(2) Duplicating accurately damaged or defective ballots.

(3) Securing vote by mail ballots to prevent tampering with them before they are counted on election day.

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(e) A vote by mail voter observer shall not interfere with the orderly processing of vote by mail ballot return envelopes or the processing and counting of vote by mail ballots, including the touching or handling of the ballots.

Elections Code section 15105

Prior to processing and opening the identification envelopes of vote by mail voters, the elections official shall make available a list of vote by mail voters for public inspection, from which challenges may be presented. Challenges may be made for the same reasons as those made against a voter voting at a polling place. In addition, a challenge may be entered on the grounds that the ballot was not received within the time provided by this code or that a person is imprisoned for a conviction of a felony. All challenges shall be made prior to the opening of the identification envelope of the challenged vote by mail voter.

Elections Code section 15106

Except as otherwise provided, the processing of vote by mail ballot return envelopes, the processing and counting of vote by mail ballots, and the disposition of challenges of vote by mail ballots shall be according to the laws now in force pertaining to the election for which they are cast. Because the voter is not present, the challenger shall have the burden of establishing extraordinary proof of the validity of the challenge at the time the challenge is made.

Elections Code section 3203

(a) Upon receipt of an application for permanent vote by mail status, the county elections official shall process the application in the same manner as an application for a vote by mail ballot, or, in the case of an application made pursuant to Section 3102, in the same manner as an application for a special absent voter ballot or overseas ballot.

(b) In addition to processing applications in accordance with Chapter 1 (commencing with Section 3000), if it is determined that the applicant is a registered voter, the county elections official shall do the following:

(1) Place the voter's name upon a list of those to whom a vote by mail ballot is sent each time there is an election within their precinct.

(2) Include in all vote by mail mailings to the voter an explanation of the vote by mail procedure and an explanation of Section 3206.

(3) Maintain a copy of the vote by mail ballot list on file open to public inspection for election and governmental purposes.

Election Day

Polling Place Operations

Elections Code section 2300

(a) All voters, pursuant to the California Constitution and this code, shall be citizens of the United States. There shall be a Voter Bill of Rights for voters, available to the public, which shall convey all of the following to voters:

(1)(A) You have the right to cast a ballot if you are a valid registered voter.

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(B) A valid registered voter means a United States citizen who is a resident in this state, who is at least 18 years of age and not in prison or on parole for conviction of a felony, and who is registered to vote at his or her current residence address.

(2) You have the right to cast a provisional ballot if your name is not listed on the voting rolls.

(3) You have the right to cast a ballot if you are present and in line at the polling place before the close of the polls.

(4) You have the right to cast a secret ballot free from intimidation.

(5)(A) You have the right to receive a new ballot if, before casting your ballot, you believe you made a mistake.

(B) If at any time before you finally cast your ballot, you feel you have made a mistake, you have the right to exchange the spoiled ballot for a new ballot. Vote by mail voters may also request and receive a new ballot if they return their spoiled ballot to an elections official before the closing of the polls on election day.

(6) You have the right to receive assistance in casting your ballot, if you are unable to vote without assistance.

(7) You have the right to return a completed vote by mail ballot to any precinct in the county [state].

(8) You have the right to election materials in another language, if there are sufficient residents in your precinct to warrant production.

(9)(A) You have the right to ask questions about election procedures and observe the election process.

(B) You have the right to ask questions of the precinct board and elections officials regarding election procedures and to receive an answer or be directed to the appropriate official for an answer. However, if persistent questioning disrupts the execution of their duties, the precinct board or elections officials may discontinue responding to questions.

(10) You have the right to report any illegal or fraudulent activity to a local elections official or to the Secretary of State's office.

(b) Beneath the Voter Bill of Rights there shall be listed a toll-free telephone number to call if a person has been denied a voting right or to report election fraud or misconduct.

(c) The Secretary of State may do both of the following:

(1) Develop regulations to implement and clarify the Voter Bill of Rights set forth in subdivision (a).

(2) Revise the wording of the Voter Bill of Rights as necessary to ensure the use of clear and concise language free from technical terms.

(d) The Voter Bill of Rights set forth in subdivisions (a) and (b) shall be made available to the public before each election and on election day, at a minimum, as follows:

(1) The Voter Bill of Rights shall be printed in the state voter information guide, pursuant to Section 9084, in a minimum of 12-point type. Subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a), subparagraph (B) of paragraph (5) of subdivision (a), and subparagraph (B) of paragraph (9) of subdivision (a) may be printed in a smaller point type than the rest of the Voter Bill of Rights.

(2) Posters or other printed materials containing the Voter Bill of Rights shall be included in precinct supplies pursuant to Section 14105.

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Elections Code section 14215

Before receiving any ballots, the precinct board, in the presence of any persons assembled at the polling place, shall open and exhibit and close the ballot container or containers. Thereafter, the ballot container or containers shall not be removed from the polling place or presence of the bystanders until all the ballots are counted, nor opened until after the polls are finally closed.

Elections Code section 14422

(a)(1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the county elections official may direct a precinct board to seal the ballot container prior to the closing of the polls, in accordance with the procedures set forth in Sections 14420 and 14421.

(2) Notwithstanding Section 14215, as soon as the container is sealed, the county elections official may direct at least two elections officials to remove the sealed ballot container of voted untallied ballots from the polling place and the presence of any bystanders and to deliver the container to a receiving center or central counting place as directed.

(3) At least 48 hours in advance of an election, the elections official shall notify the public of the dates, times, and places at which ballot containers will be delivered pursuant to this subdivision.

(b) Upon receipt of a container at a receiving center or central counting place pursuant to subdivision (a), the county elections official may process the voted untallied ballots, but shall not tally the ballots or release any results prior to the closing of the polls.

(c) The Secretary of State shall adopt regulations addressing the secure delivery and transfer of ballots to a receiving center or central counting place pursuant to this section.

(d) This section shall not be construed as relieving a precinct board of its responsibility to account for ballots pursuant to Section 14405.

Elections Code section 14221

Only voters engaged in receiving, preparing, or depositing their ballots and persons authorized by the precinct board to keep order and enforce the law may be permitted to be within the voting booth area before the closing of the polls.

Elections Code section 14222

Nothing contained in this code shall prevent a voter from being accompanied by a child or children under the age of 18 years while the voter is within the voting booth area if the child is, or children are, under the voter's care.

Elections Code section 14223

(a) Only members of the precinct board, and persons while signing their names on the roster, shall be permitted, during the hours within which voting is in progress, to sit at the desk or table used by the precinct board.

(b) Any person may inspect the roster while voting is in progress and while votes are being counted. However, this shall not be done at a time or in a manner which will impede, interfere, or interrupt the normal process of voting.

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Elections Code section 14224

(a) Except as provided in Section 14222, a voting booth or compartment shall not be occupied by more than one person at a time, unless the voter is eligible under the assisted-voter provisions.

(b)(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2), a voter shall not remain in or occupy a voting booth or compartment longer than is necessary to mark his or her ballot, which shall not exceed 10 minutes.

(2) If a voter informs a precinct board member that the voter requires additional time to mark his or her ballot, a longer period shall be allowed. However, if the precinct board member determines that the voter is attempting to interfere with the conduct of the election and does not require additional time to mark his or her ballot, the precinct board member may contact the elections official, who may order that the voter not be provided with additional time to mark his or her ballot.

Elections Code section 14227

Any member of the precinct board, when using a language other than English at the polls, shall communicate with voters in that language only as he or she would be lawfully permitted to communicate in English under the code. The member shall be subject to like penalty for any illegal communication as if it had occurred in English.

Elections Code section 14281

On receiving a ballot, the voter shall forthwith retire alone to one of the booths or compartments provided, and mark the ballot, unless Section 14222 or 14224 is applicable.

Elections Code section 14282

(a) When a voter declares under oath, administered by any member of the precinct board at the time the voter appears at the polling place to vote, that the voter is then unable to mark a ballot, the voter shall receive the assistance of not more than two persons selected by the voter, other than the voter's employer, an agent of the voter's employer, or an officer or agent of the union of which the voter is a member.

(b) The county elections official shall provide information on the county elections Internet Web site and in the county voter information guide informing voters that a voter who is unable to mark a ballot may bring up to two individuals to the polls to assist them in voting as specified in subdivision (a). The information shall be available in all languages for which the county has requirements under Section 14201 of this code and Section 203 of the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 (52 U.S.C. Sec. 10101 et seq.).

(c) A person assisting a voter shall not divulge any information regarding the marking of the ballot.

(d) In those polling places that are inaccessible under the guidelines promulgated by the Secretary of State for accessibility by the physically handicapped, a physically handicapped person may appear outside the polling place and vote a regular ballot. The person may vote the ballot in a place that is as near as possible to the polling place and that is accessible to the physically handicapped. A precinct board member shall take a regular ballot to that person, qualify that person to vote, and return the voted ballot to the polling place. In those precincts in which it is impractical to vote a regular ballot outside the polling place, vote by mail ballots shall be provided in sufficient numbers to

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accommodate physically handicapped persons who present themselves on election day. The vote by mail ballot shall be presented to and voted by a physically handicapped person in the same manner as a regular ballot may be voted by that person outside the polling place.

Conducting a Challenge at the Polls

Elections Code section 14240

(a) A person offering to vote may be orally challenged within the polling place only by a member of the precinct board upon any or all of the following grounds:

- (1) That the voter is not the person whose name appears on the roster.
- (2) That the voter is not a resident of the precinct, or in an election conducted using a voter center, not a resident of the county.
- (3) That the voter is not a citizen of the United States.
- (4) That the voter has voted in that election.
- (5) That the voter is presently on parole for the conviction of a felony.

(b) A person, other than a member of a precinct board or other official responsible for the conduct of the election, shall not challenge or question any voter concerning the voter's qualifications to vote.

(c) If any member of a precinct board receives, by mail or otherwise, any document or list concerning the residence or other voting qualifications of any person or persons, with the express or implied suggestion, request, or demand that the person or persons be challenged, the board member shall first determine whether the document or list contains or is accompanied by evidence constituting probable cause to justify or substantiate a challenge. In any case, before making any use whatever of such a list or document, the member of the precinct board shall immediately contact the elections official, charged with the duty of conducting the election, and describe the contents of the document or list and the evidence, if any, received bearing on voting qualifications. The elections official shall advise the members of the precinct board as to the sufficiency of probable cause for instituting and substantiating the challenge and as to the law as herein provided, relating to hearings and procedures for challenges by members of the precinct board and determination thereof by a precinct board. The elections official may, if necessary, designate a deputy to receive and answer inquiries from precinct board members as herein provided.

Elections Code section 14241

A piece of mailed matter returned undelivered by the post office shall not be accepted or used as evidence upon which to initiate a challenge as to residency by any member of the precinct board unless other evidence or testimony is also presented, nor shall the mailed matter, standing alone without other evidence or testimony, be accepted as evidence by the precinct board in determining a challenge.

Elections Code section 14242

The ground for challenge set forth in paragraph (2) of subdivision (a) of Section 14240 shall not apply to any person duly registered as a voter in any precinct in California and moving from that precinct within 14 days prior to an election.

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Elections Code section 14243

If the challenge is on the ground that the person seeking to vote is not the person whose name appears on the roster, a member of the precinct board shall tender the following oath: "You do swear (or affirm) that you are the person whose name is entered on the roster."

Elections Code section 14244

If the challenge is on the ground that the person seeking to vote is not a resident of the precinct, or in an election conducted using a voter center, not a resident of the county, the person challenged shall be sworn to answer questions, and after having been sworn, a member of the precinct board shall ask that person: "Are you a resident of this precinct?" or in an election conducted using a voter center, "Are you a resident of the county?"; If the answer to the question is "Yes," without significant qualification, no other questions shall be asked.

Elections Code section 14245

If the challenge is on the ground that the person challenged has already cast a ballot for this election, a member of the precinct board shall tender to the person challenged this oath: "You do swear (or affirm) that you have not previously voted in this election, either by vote by mail ballot or at a polling place."

Elections Code section 14246

If the challenge is on the ground either that the person challenged is not the person whose name appears on the roster, or that he or she has voted that day, the challenge shall be determined in favor of the person challenged if that person takes the oath as set forth either in Section 14243 or 14245.

Elections Code section 14247

Challenges of voters that they are not residents of the precinct or citizens of the United States shall be tried and determined by the precinct board at the time of the challenge. The precinct board may, at its discretion, also request any other person, present in the polling place to be sworn and answer questions, whom the board believes may have knowledge or information concerning the facts of the challenge.

Elections Code section 14248

Before administering an oath to a person regarding his or her place of residence, a member of the precinct board shall read to the person challenged, the rules prescribed by Section 14249 and Article 2 (commencing with Section 2020) of Chapter 1 of Division 2.

Elections Code section 14249

If any person challenged refuses to take the oaths tendered, or refuses to be sworn and to answer the questions concerning the matter of residence, that person shall not be allowed to vote.

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Elections Code section 14250

The precinct board, in determining the place of residence of any person, shall be governed by the rules set forth in Article 2 (commencing with Section 2020) of Chapter 1 of Division 2.

Elections Code section 14251

Any doubt in the interpretation of the law shall be resolved in favor of the challenged voter.

Elections Code section 14252

The precinct board shall compile a list showing all of the following:

- (a) The name and address of each person challenged.
- (b) The name, address, and any other identification as a voter, of each person offering information concerning any person's qualifications to vote, or testifying pursuant to Section 14247, together with the name and address and any other identification of the person about whom the information or testimony is given.
- (c) The grounds of each challenge.
- (d) The determination of the board upon the challenge, together with any written evidence pertaining thereto.
- (e) If evidence has been presented to the board requesting challenges, the evidence shall be returned to the elections official responsible for the conduct of the election.

Elections Code section 14253

In the event that the precinct board determines that persistent challenging of voters is resulting in a delay of voting sufficient to cause voters to forego voting because of insufficient time or for fear of unwarranted intimidation, the board shall discontinue all challenges, and so note on the roster.

Criminal Interference with Voters or Voting Process

Elections Code section 18370

No person, on election day, or at any time that a voter may be casting a ballot, shall, within 100 feet of a polling place, a satellite location under Section 3018, or an elections official's office:

- (a) Circulate an initiative, referendum, recall, or nomination petition or any other petition.
- (b) Solicit a vote or speak to a voter on the subject of marking his or her ballot.
- (c) Place a sign relating to voters' qualifications or speak to a voter on the subject of his or her qualifications except as provided in Section 14240.
- (d) Do any electioneering as defined by Section 319.5.

As used in this section, "100 feet of a polling place, a satellite location under Section 3018, or an elections official's office" means a distance 100 feet from the room or rooms in which voters are signing the roster and casting ballots.

Any person who violates any of the provisions of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor.

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Elections Code section 18502

Any person who in any manner interferes with the officers holding an election or conducting a canvass, or with the voters lawfully exercising their rights of voting at an election, as to prevent the election or canvass from being fairly held and lawfully conducted, is punishable by imprisonment pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170 of the Penal Code for 16 months or two or three years.

Elections Code section 18540

(a) Every person who makes use of or threatens to make use of any force, violence, or tactic of coercion or intimidation, to induce or compel any other person to vote or refrain from voting at any election or to vote or refrain from voting for any particular person or measure at any election, or because any person voted or refrained from voting at any election or voted or refrained from voting for any particular person or measure at any election is guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170 of the Penal Code for 16 months or two or three years.

(b) Every person who hires or arranges for any other person to make use of or threaten to make use of any force, violence, or tactic of coercion or intimidation, to induce or compel any other person to vote or refrain from voting at any election or to vote or refrain from voting for any particular person or measure at any election, or because any person voted or refrained from voting at any election or voted or refrained from voting for any particular person or measure at any election is guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170 of the Penal Code for 16 months or two or three years.

Elections Code section 18541

(a) No person shall, with the intent of dissuading another person from voting, within 100 feet of a polling place, do any of the following:

(1) Solicit a vote or speak to a voter on the subject of marking his or her ballot.

(2) Place a sign relating to voters' qualifications or speak to a voter on the subject of his or her qualifications except as provided in Section 14240.

(3) Photograph, video record, or otherwise record a voter entering or exiting a polling place.

(b) Any violation of this section is punishable by imprisonment in a county jail for not more than 12 months, or in the state prison. Any person who conspires to violate this section is guilty of a felony.

(c) For purposes of this section, 100 feet means a distance of 100 feet from the room or rooms in which voters are signing the roster and casting ballots.

Elections Code section 18543

(a) Every person who knowingly challenges a person's right to vote without probable cause or on fraudulent or spurious grounds, or who engages in mass, indiscriminate, and groundless challenging of voters solely for the purpose of preventing voters from voting or to delay the process of voting, or who fraudulently advises any person that he or she is not eligible to vote or is not registered to vote when in fact that person is eligible or is registered, or who violates Section 14240, is punishable by imprisonment in the county jail for not more than 12 months or in the state prison.

(b) Every person who conspires to violate subdivision (a) is guilty of a felony.

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Elections Code section 18562.5

(a) A member of the public is guilty of a misdemeanor if, while observing any of the following, he or she willfully engages in any conduct set forth in subdivision (b):

(1) The processing of vote by mail ballots conducted pursuant to Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 15100) of Division 15.

(2) The semifinal official canvass conducted pursuant to Chapter 3 (commencing with Section 15150) of Division 15.

(3) The official canvass conducted pursuant to Chapter 4 (commencing with Section 15300) of Division 15.

(4) A recount conducted pursuant to Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 15600) of Division 15.

(b)(1) Attempting to ascertain the identity and ballot choices of a voter, or having observed or learned the identity of a voter, attempting to ascertain the ballot choices of that voter.

(2) Opening a provisional or vote by mail ballot envelope containing a voted ballot in order to ascertain the voter's ballot choices.

(3) Making or placing a mark or device on a ballot or secrecy envelope in an attempt to ascertain the voter's ballot choices.

Elections Code section 18564

Any person is guilty of a felony, punishable by imprisonment pursuant to subdivision (h) of Section 1170 of the Penal Code for two, three, or four years who, before or during an election:

(a) Tamper with, interferes with, or attempts to interfere with, the correct operation of, or willfully damages in order to prevent the use of, any voting machine, voting device, voting system, vote tabulating device, or ballot tally software program source codes.

(b) Interferes or attempts to interfere with the secrecy of voting or ballot tally software program source codes.

(c) Knowingly, and without authorization, makes or has in his or her possession a key to a voting machine that has been adopted and will be used in elections in this state.

(d) Willfully substitutes or attempts to substitute forged or counterfeit ballot tally software program source codes.

Closing the Polls

Elections Code section 14403

(a) Immediately upon the closing of the polls and before any voted ballot is taken from any of the ballot containers, the precinct board member shall, in the presence of all persons in the room who may desire to observe them, proceed to render the unused ballots unusable in one of the following ways:

(1) By drawing across its face, in ink or indelible pencil, two lines that cross each other, the cross to be more than three inches square. The precinct board member shall thereupon, immediately and before any ballots are taken from any ballot container, place all defaced ballots within an envelope or other receptacle provided for that purpose.

(2) By tearing or cutting in a manner so that it is apparent that the ballot has been intentionally destroyed to prevent its use. If this method of destruction is used, it shall be

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done in a manner so that the serial number of the ballots is retained for the purposes of reconciliation.

(3) By placing all of the unused ballots into a special container provided for that purpose. A tamperproof seal containing spaces for entering the total number of unused ballots enclosed, the beginning and ending serial numbers thereof, and signature lines for all members of the precinct board following a statement certifying that all of the ballots were placed in the container in their presence and the information on the seal is true and correct, shall be provided. After signing the seal, it shall be placed on the container in a manner so that the container cannot be opened without tearing the seal.

(b) This section does not apply to elections conducted using vote centers.

Elections Code section 14404

(a) Immediately upon the arrival of the hour when the polls are required by law to be closed on election day, the elections official conducting the election shall openly, in the elections official's main office, in the presence of any persons who are present to observe, according to the procedure set forth in Section 14403, proceed to render every unused ballot remaining in the control of the elections official unusable. The elections official shall forthwith make and file an affidavit, in writing, as to the number of ballots destroyed. If the procedure in subdivision (c) of Section 14403 is used, the tamperproof seal shall be signed by the elections official and at least one deputy or assistant elections official or registrar. The sealed container shall then be placed, with the sealed containers containing unused ballots from the precincts, in a security area by the elections official until disposition is made pursuant to Section 17301 or 17302. Alternatively, the elections official may, immediately upon the arrival of the hour when the polls are closed, recycle for any other lawful purpose any unused ballots remaining in the control of the elections official that clearly identify the election for which they were prepared. No later than 30 days following the last day to certify the official results of the election, the elections official shall make and file an affidavit, in writing, as to the number of ballots recycled. At the elections official's discretion, the unused ballots may be recycled up to six months following an election or at the conclusion of an election contest proceeding, whichever is later.

(b) This section does not apply to elections conducted using vote centers.

Ballot Processing

Elections Code section 15004

(a) Each qualified political party may employ, and may have present at the central counting place or places, not more than two representatives to check and review the preparation and operation of the tabulating devices, their programming and testing, and have the representatives in attendance at any or all phases of the election.

(b) Any bona fide association of citizens or a media organization may employ, and may have present at the central counting place or places, not more than two representatives to check and review the preparation and operation of the tabulating devices, their programming and testing, and have the representatives in attendance at any or all phases of the election.

(c) The county elections official may limit the total number of representatives employed pursuant to subdivision (b) in attendance to no more than 10 by a manner in

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which each interested bona fide association of citizens or media organization has an equal opportunity to participate. Any representatives employed and in attendance pursuant to subdivision (a) shall not be subject to the limit specified in this subdivision.

Post Election Day

Canvass Board Members

Elections Code section 15304

In jurisdictions using a central counting place, the elections official may appoint not less than three deputies to open the envelopes or containers with the materials returned from the precincts. If, after examination, any of the materials are incomplete, ambiguous, not properly authenticated, or otherwise defective, the precinct officers may be summoned before the elections official and examined under oath to describe polling place procedures and to correct the errors or omissions.

Canvass Process

Elections Code section 335.5

The "official canvass" is the public process of processing and tallying all ballots received in an election, including, but not limited to, provisional ballots and vote by mail ballots not included in the semifinal official canvass. The official canvass also includes the process of reconciling ballots, attempting to prohibit duplicate voting by vote by mail and provisional voters, and performance of the manual tally of 1 percent of all precincts.

Elections Code section 353.5

The "semifinal official canvass" is the public process of collecting, processing, and tallying ballots and, for state or statewide elections, reporting results to the Secretary of State on election night. The semifinal official canvass may include some or all of the vote by mail and provisional vote totals.

Elections Code section 15201

(a) As soon as the polls are closed, the precinct board shall, in the presence of the public do all of the following:

(1) Seal the container used to transport voted ballots and insure that the precinct number, or in an election conducted using a voter center, the vote center number, is designated on the ballot container.

(2) Certify, sign, and seal the several packages or envelopes as directed by the elections official.

(3) By not less than two of their number, deliver the ballot container and packages to the elections official at the central counting place in the manner prescribed by the elections official. The ballot container and packages shall remain in their exclusive possession until delivered to the elections official.

(b) This section also applies to ballots counted manually pursuant to Article 6 (commencing with Section 15290).

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Elections Code section 15204

All proceedings at the central counting place, or counting places, if applicable, shall be open to the view of the public but no person, except one employed and designated for the purpose by the elections official or his or her authorized deputy, shall touch any ballot container. Access to the area where electronic data processing equipment is being operated may be restricted to those persons authorized by the elections official.

Elections Code section 15272

The count shall be public and shall be continued without adjournment until completed and the result is declared. During the reading and tallying, the ballot read and the tally sheet kept shall be within the clear view of watchers.

Elections Code section 15301

The canvass shall commence no later than the Thursday following the election, shall be open to the public, and, for state or statewide elections, shall result in a report of results to the Secretary of State. The canvass shall be continued daily, Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays excepted, for not less than six hours each day until completed.

Vote-by-Mail Ballot Counting

Elections Code section 15104

(a) The processing of vote by mail ballot return envelopes, and the processing and counting of vote by mail ballots, shall be open to the public, both prior to and after the election.

(b) A member of the county grand jury, and at least one member each of the Republican county central committee, the Democratic county central committee, and of any other party with a candidate on the ballot, and any other interested organization, shall be permitted to observe and challenge the manner in which the vote by mail ballots are handled, from the processing of vote by mail ballot return envelopes through the counting and disposition of the ballots.

(c) The elections official shall notify vote by mail voter observers and the public at least 48 hours in advance of the dates, times, and places where vote by mail ballots will be processed and counted.

(d) Notwithstanding paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) of Section 2194, vote by mail voter observers shall be allowed sufficiently close access to enable them to observe the vote by mail ballot return envelopes and the signatures thereon and challenge whether those individuals handling vote by mail ballots are following established procedures, including all of the following:

(1) Verifying signatures and addresses on the vote by mail ballot return envelopes by comparing them to voter registration information.

(2) Duplicating accurately damaged or defective ballots.

(3) Securing vote by mail ballots to prevent tampering with them before they are counted on election day.

(e) A vote by mail voter observer shall not interfere with the orderly processing of vote by mail ballot return envelopes or the processing and counting of vote by mail ballots, including the touching or handling of the ballots.

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Elections Code section 15105

Prior to processing and opening the identification envelopes of vote by mail voters, the elections official shall make available a list of vote by mail voters for public inspection, from which challenges may be presented. Challenges may be made for the same reasons as those made against a voter voting at a polling place. In addition, a challenge may be entered on the grounds that the ballot was not received within the time provided by this code or that a person is imprisoned for a conviction of a felony. All challenges shall be made prior to the opening of the identification envelope of the challenged vote by mail voter.

Elections Code section 15106

Except as otherwise provided, the processing of vote by mail ballot return envelopes, the processing and counting of vote by mail ballots, and the disposition of challenges of vote by mail ballots shall be according to the laws now in force pertaining to the election for which they are cast. Because the voter is not present, the challenger shall have the burden of establishing extraordinary proof of the validity of the challenge at the time the challenge is made.

Elections Code section 15109

Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, the counting and canvassing of vote by mail ballots shall be conducted in the same manner and under the same regulations as used for ballots cast in a precinct polling place.

Elections Code section 3019

(a)(1) Upon receiving a vote by mail ballot, the elections official shall compare the signature on the identification envelope with either of the following to determine if the signatures compare:

(A) The signature appearing on the voter's affidavit of registration or any previous affidavit of registration of the voter.

(B) The signature appearing on a form issued by an elections official that contains the voter's signature and that is part of the voter's registration record.

(2) In comparing signatures pursuant to this section, the elections official may use facsimiles of voters' signatures, provided that the method of preparing and displaying the facsimiles complies with the law.

(3) In comparing signatures pursuant to this section, an elections official may use signature verification technology. If signature verification technology determines that the signatures do not compare, the elections official shall visually examine the signatures and verify that the signatures do not compare.

(4) The variation of a signature caused by the substitution of initials for the first or middle name, or both, is not grounds for the elections official to determine that the signatures do not compare.

(b) If upon conducting the comparison of signatures pursuant to subdivision (a) the elections official determines that the signatures compare, he or she shall deposit the ballot, still in the identification envelope, in a ballot container in his or her office.

(c) If upon conducting the comparison of signatures pursuant to subdivision (a) the elections official determines that the signatures do not compare, the identification envelope shall not be opened and the ballot shall not be counted. The elections official

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shall write the cause of the rejection on the face of the identification envelope only after completing the procedures described in subdivision (d).

(d)(1) A minimum of eight days prior to the certification of the election, the elections official shall provide notice to all voters identified pursuant to subdivision (c) of the opportunity to verify their signatures no later than 5 p.m. two days prior to the certification of the election.

(2) The notice and instructions shall be in substantially the following form:

“READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY. FAILURE TO FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS MAY CAUSE YOUR VOTE BY MAIL BALLOT NOT TO COUNT.

1. We have determined that the signature you provided on your vote by mail ballot does not match the signature(s) on file in your voter record. In order to ensure that your vote by mail ballot will be counted, the signature verification statement must be completed and returned as soon as possible.

2. The signature verification statement must be received by the elections official of the county where you are registered to vote no later than 5 p.m. two days prior to certification of the election.

3. You must sign your name where specified on the signature verification statement (Voter’s Signature).

4. Place the signature verification statement into a mailing envelope addressed to your local elections official. Mail, deliver, or have the completed statement delivered to the elections official. Be sure there is sufficient postage if mailed and that the address of the elections official is correct.

5. If you do not wish to send the signature verification statement by mail or have it delivered, you may submit your completed statement by email or facsimile transmission to your local elections official using the information provided.”

(3) The elections official shall not reject a vote by mail ballot identified pursuant to subdivision (c) if each of the following conditions is satisfied:

(A) The voter delivers, in person, by mail, by fax, or by email, a signature verification statement signed by the voter and the elections official receives the statement no later than 5 p.m. two days prior to the certification of the election, or the voter, before the close of the polls on election day, completes and submits a signature verification statement to a polling place within the county or a ballot dropoff box.

(B) Upon receipt of the signature verification statement, the elections official shall compare the signature on the statement with the signature on file in the voter’s record.

(i) If upon conducting the comparison of signatures the elections official determines that the signatures compare, he or she shall deposit the ballot, still in the identification envelope, in a ballot container in his or her office.

(ii) If upon conducting the comparison of the signatures the elections official determines that the signatures do not compare, the identification envelope shall not be opened and the ballot shall not be counted. The elections official shall write the cause of the rejection on the face of the identification envelope.

(4) The signature verification statement shall be in substantially the following form and may be included on the same page as the notice and instructions specified in paragraph (2):

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“SIGNATURE VERIFICATION STATEMENT

I,, am a registered voter of _____ County,
State of California. I declare under penalty of perjury that I requested and returned a
vote by mail ballot. I am a resident of the precinct in which I have voted, and I am the
person whose name appears on the vote by mail ballot envelope. I understand that if
I commit or attempt any fraud in connection with voting, or if I aid or abet fraud or
attempt to aid or abet fraud in connection with voting, I may be convicted of a felony
punishable by imprisonment for 16 months or two or three years. I understand that
my failure to sign this statement means that my vote by mail ballot will be
invalidated.

Voter’s Signature
Address”

(5) An elections official shall include the vote by mail ballot signature verification statement and instructions provided in this subdivision on his or her Internet Web site, and shall provide the election official’s mailing address, email address, and facsimile transmission number on the Internet Web page containing the statement and instructions.

(6) If the elections official determines that the signatures compare, the official shall use the signature in the signature verification statement, even if returned untimely, to update the voter’s signature for future elections.

(e)(1) (A) Notwithstanding any other law, if an elections official determines that a voter has failed to sign the identification envelope, the elections official shall not reject the vote by mail ballot if the voter does any of the following:

(i) Signs the identification envelope at the office of the elections official during regular business hours before 5 p.m. on the eighth day after the election.

(ii) Before 5 p.m. on the eighth day after the election, completes and submits an unsigned ballot statement in substantially the following form:

“UNSIGNED BALLOT STATEMENT

I,, am a registered voter of _____ County,
State of California. I declare under penalty of perjury that I requested and
returned a vote by mail ballot and that I have not and will not vote more than one
ballot in this election. I am a resident of the precinct in which I have voted, and I
am the person whose name appears on the vote by mail ballot envelope. I
understand that if I commit or attempt any fraud in connection with voting, or if I
aid or abet fraud or attempt to aid or abet fraud in connection with voting, I may
be convicted of a felony punishable by imprisonment for 16 months or two or
three years. I understand that my failure to sign this statement means that my
vote by mail ballot will be invalidated.

Voter’s Signature
Address”

(iii) Before the close of the polls on election day, completes and submits an unsigned ballot statement, in the form described in clause (ii), to a polling place within the county or a ballot dropoff box.

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(B) If timely submitted, the elections official shall accept any completed unsigned ballot statement. Upon receipt of the unsigned ballot statement, the elections official shall compare the voter's signature on the statement in the manner provided by this section.

(i) If the elections official determines that the signatures compare, he or she shall attach the unsigned ballot statement to the identification envelope and deposit the ballot, still in the identification envelope, in a ballot container in his or her office.

(ii) If the elections official determines that the signatures do not compare, the identification envelope shall not be opened and the ballot shall not be counted.

(C) An elections official may use methods other than those described in subparagraph (A) to obtain a voter's signature on an unsigned identification envelope.

(2) Instructions shall accompany the unsigned ballot statement in substantially the following form:

“READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY BEFORE COMPLETING THE STATEMENT. FAILURE TO FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS MAY CAUSE YOUR BALLOT NOT TO COUNT.

1. In order to ensure that your vote by mail ballot will be counted, your statement should be completed and returned as soon as possible so that it can reach the elections official of the county in which your precinct is located no later than 5 p.m. on the eighth day after the election.

2. You must sign your name on the line above (Voter's Signature).

3. Place the statement into a mailing envelope addressed to your local elections official. Mail, deliver, or have delivered the completed statement to the elections official. Be sure there is sufficient postage if mailed and that the address of the elections official is correct.

4. If you do not wish to send the statement by mail or have it delivered, you may submit your completed statement by facsimile or email transmission to your local elections official, or submit your completed statement to a polling place within the county or a ballot dropoff box before the close of the polls on election day.”

(3) An elections official shall include the unsigned ballot statement and instructions described in this subdivision on his or her Internet Web site, and shall provide the elections official's mailing address, email address, and facsimile transmission number on the Internet Web page containing the statement and instructions.

(f) A ballot shall not be removed from its identification envelope until the time for processing ballots. A ballot shall not be rejected for cause after the identification envelope has been opened.

Provisional Ballot Process

Elections Code section 14310(d)

The Secretary of State shall establish a free access system that any voter who casts a provisional ballot may access to discover whether the voter's provisional ballot was counted and, if not, the reason why it was not counted.

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One Percent Manual Tally

Elections Code section 336.5

(a) "One percent manual tally" is the public process of manually tallying votes in 1 percent of the precincts, selected at random by the elections official, and in one precinct for each race not included in the randomly selected precincts. This procedure is conducted during the official canvass to verify the accuracy of the automated count

(b) In an election conducted using vote centers, a 1 percent manual tally can be conducted using the batch process set forth in Section 15360.

Elections Code section 15360

(a) During the official canvass of every election in which a voting system is used, the official conducting the election shall conduct a public manual tally of the ballots tabulated by those devices, including vote by mail ballots, using either of the following methods:

(1)(A) A public manual tally of the ballots canvassed in the semifinal official canvass, including vote by mail ballots but not including provisional ballots, cast in 1 percent of the precincts chosen at random by the elections official. If 1 percent of the precincts is less than one whole precinct, the tally shall be conducted in one precinct chosen at random by the elections official.

(B)(i) In addition to the 1 percent manual tally, the elections official shall, for each race not included in the initial group of precincts, count one additional precinct. The manual tally shall apply only to the race not previously counted.

(ii) The elections official may, at his or her discretion, select additional precincts for the manual tally, which may include vote by mail and provisional ballots.

(2) A two-part public manual tally, which includes both of the following:

(A) A public manual tally of the ballots canvassed in the semifinal official canvass, not including vote by mail or provisional ballots, cast in 1 percent of the precincts chosen at random by the elections official and conducted pursuant to paragraph (1).

(B)(i) A public manual tally of not less than 1 percent of the vote by mail ballots canvassed in the semifinal official canvass. Batches of vote by mail ballots shall be chosen at random by the elections official.

(ii) For the purposes of this section, a "batch" means a set of ballots tabulated by the voting system devices, for which the voting system can produce a report of the votes cast.

(iii)(I) In addition to the 1 percent manual tally of the vote by mail ballots, the elections official shall, for each race not included in the initial 1 percent manual tally of vote by mail ballots, count one additional batch of vote by mail ballots. The manual tally shall apply only to the race not previously counted.

(II) The elections official may, at his or her discretion, select additional batches for the manual tally, which may include vote by mail and provisional ballots.

(b) If vote by mail ballots are cast on a direct recording electronic voting system at the office of an elections official or at a satellite location of the office of an elections official pursuant to Section 3018, the official conducting the election shall either include those ballots in the manual tally conducted pursuant to paragraph (1) or (2) of subdivision (a) or conduct a public manual tally of those ballots cast on no fewer than 1 percent of all

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the direct recording electronic voting machines used in that election chosen at random by the elections official.

(c) The elections official shall use either a random number generator or other method specified in regulations that shall be adopted by the Secretary of State to randomly choose the initial precincts, batches of vote by mail ballots, or direct recording electronic voting machines subject to the public manual tally.

(d) The elections official shall not randomly choose the initial precincts or select an additional precinct for the manual tally until after the close of the polls on election day.

(e) The manual tally shall be a public process, with the official conducting the election providing at least a five-day public notice of the time and place of the manual tally and of the time and place of the selection of the precincts, batches, or direct recording electronic voting machines subject to the public manual tally prior to conducting the selection and tally.

(f) The official conducting the election shall include a report on the results of the 1 percent manual tally in the certification of the official canvass of the vote. This report shall identify any discrepancies between the machine count and the manual tally and a description of how each of these discrepancies was resolved. In resolving a discrepancy involving a vote recorded by means of a punchcard voting system or by electronic or electromechanical vote tabulating devices, the voter verified paper audit trail shall govern if there is a discrepancy between it and the electronic record.

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Appendix

Voter Bill of Rights

You have the following rights:

1. **The right to vote if you are a registered voter.** You are eligible to vote if you are:
 - a U.S. citizen living in California
 - at least 18 years old
 - registered where you currently live
 - not currently in state or federal prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony
 - not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court
2. **The right to vote if you are a registered voter even if your name is not on the list.**

You will vote using a provisional ballot. Your vote will be counted if elections officials determine that you are eligible to vote.
3. **The right to vote if you are still in line when the polls close.**
4. **The right to cast a secret ballot** without anyone bothering you or telling you how to vote.
5. **The right to get a new ballot if you have made a mistake,** if you have not already cast your ballot. You can:
Ask an elections official at a polling place for a new ballot,
Exchange your vote-by-mail ballot for a new one at an elections office, or at your polling place, or
Vote using a provisional ballot.
6. **The right to get help casting your ballot** from anyone you choose, except from your employer or union representative.
7. **The right to drop off your completed vote-by-mail ballot at any polling place** in California.
8. **The right to get election materials in a language other than English** if enough people in your voting precinct speak that language.
9. **The right to ask questions to elections officials about election procedures** and watch the election process. If the person you ask cannot answer your questions, they must send you to the right person for an answer. If you are disruptive, they can stop answering you.
10. **The right to report any illegal or fraudulent election activity** to an elections official or the Secretary of State's office.

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Special Notice

- Polls are open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on the day indicated in the posted county Voter Information Guide.
- Specific instructions on how to vote, including how to cast a provisional ballot, can be obtained from a poll worker or by reading the information mailed to you by your local elections official.
- If you are a newly registered voter, you may be asked to provide appropriate identification or other documentation according to federal law. But please note that every individual has the right to cast a provisional ballot even if he or she does not provide the documentation.
- It is against the law to represent yourself as being eligible to vote unless you meet all of the requirements to vote under federal and state law.
- It is against the law to tamper with voting equipment.

If you believe you have been denied any of these rights, or you are aware of any election fraud or misconduct, please call the Secretary of State's confidential toll-free Voter Hotline at (800) 345-VOTE (8683).



On the web at www.sos.ca.gov



By phone at **(800) 345-VOTE (8683)**



By email at elections@sos.ca.gov

Information on your voter registration affidavit will be used by elections officials to send you official information on the voting process, such as the location of your polling place and the issues and candidates that will appear on the ballot. Commercial use of voter registration information is prohibited by law and is a misdemeanor. Voter information may be provided to a candidate for office, a ballot measure committee, or other person for election, scholarly, journalistic, political, or governmental purposes, as determined by the Secretary of State. Driver license and social security numbers, or your signature as shown on your voter registration card, cannot be released for these purposes. If you have any questions about the use of voter information or wish to report suspected misuse of such information, please call the Secretary of State's Voter Hotline at (800) 345-VOTE (8683).

Certain voters facing life-threatening situations may qualify for confidential voter status. For more information, contact the Secretary of State's Safe at Home program toll-free at (877) 322-5227 or visit Safe at Home at www.sos.ca.gov/registries/safe-home/.