



SB 1480 – Voting Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities

Summary

This bill permits the Secretary of State (SOS) to certify a remote accessible vote by mail (RAVBM) system that provides an option for some voters with a qualifying disability to electronically return their ballot.

Existing Law

Under current law, voters are able to use a RAVBM system to electronically receive and complete a ballot. RAVBM allows voters with disabilities to use their accessible home technology to read, and mark their ballot privately and independently. However, voters are required to return a printed copy as they would return a traditional paper VBM ballot.

In addition, despite the minimal technical and financial resources needed to adopt a RAVBM system that includes an electronic ballot return option for voters with disabilities, current law does not allow RAVBM ballots to be returned electronically.

Issue

While RAVBM has improved voting at home for many voters with disabilities, it is still impossible for some voters with visual and dexterity impairments to vote privately and independently using a RAVBM system. In particular, when printing a marked ballot, handling and manipulating the printed paper, signing and sealing the return envelope, and returning that envelope to the county elections office. For example, a voter who is blind using an RAVBM system would not have a private and independent voting experience because someone would need to help them with printing the ballot and completing the envelope requirements.

Each of these steps presents challenges that force voters with some disabilities to seek third party assistance and hence prevents an individual to cast a private and independent vote. While the voter is able

to read and mark the ballot privately and independently, they are unable to verify the printed ballot, put the printed ballot in the envelope and sign the envelope privately and independently.

In recent years, many states and localities have adopted an electronic ballot return option as part of their absentee voting systems to ensure that all voters with disabilities have a truly private and independent voting experience.

Proposal

SB 1480 permits the SOS to certify a RAVBM system that provides an option for voters with a qualifying disability to electronically return their ballot. The bill also provides the SOS with the ability to establish an accessible way for a voter with a qualifying disability to submit a signature electronically.

Upon certification of an electronic ballot return option, a county would be required to permit a voter with a qualifying disability to use that RAVBM system.

Support

Disability Rights California

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