



September 18, 2019

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: SB 523 -- SUPPORT

Dear Governor Newsom:

The California Voter Foundation strongly supports Senate Bill 523, authored by Senator Mike McGuire which, if enacted, will require county registrars to notify voters who forget to sign their vote-by-mail ballot envelopes and provide them with an opportunity to submit their signature so that their ballots will be counted rather than rejected.

In the 2018 primary and general elections, according to data from the California Secretary of State, nearly 142,000 California voters' ballots were rejected statewide, up from 128,000 in 2016. Missing signatures is one of the top three reasons why mail ballots get rejected (the other two leading reasons are late arrival and mismatched signatures).

Voting by mail has expanded significantly in California but counties provide varying ballot envelope designs and instructions to voters for how to complete and submit a vote-by-mail ballot. This lack of standardization adds to voter confusion, especially for first-time or infrequent voters, or voters requesting non-English language ballot materials. 2012 General Election research conducted by the California Civic Engagement Project found that missing signatures was the leading cause for rejected ballots among California voters whose preferred language is not English.

While some counties conduct outreach to voters whose signatures are missing from their ballot envelopes, not all do so, resulting in unequal treatment for California voters.

In Sacramento County, for last November's General Election, the Registrar of Voters' office sent 2,192 letters to voters whose envelope signatures were missing, and 1,234 voters submitted a signature after being notified, resulting in a 56 percent "cure" rate and 1,234 voters having their votes counted instead of being disenfranchised. Similarly, in June 2018, Sacramento sent out 1,798 "no signature" letters, and 973 voters sent in valid signatures, resulting in a 52 percent cure rate.

The California Voter Foundation urges you to reduce voter disenfranchisement and sign SB 523 into law to ensure all voters statewide have an equal opportunity to correct a simple mistake and have their ballots counted.

Sincerely,

Kim Alexander, President
California Voter Foundation