
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Connie Leyva, Chair

2019 - 2020 Regular

Bill No: AB 963 **Hearing Date:** June 19, 2019
Author: Petrie-Norris
Version: May 16, 2019
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Lynn Lorber

Subject: Public postsecondary education: Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act.

NOTE: This bill has been referred to the Committees on Education and Elections and Constitutional Amendments. A "do pass" motion should include referral to the Committee on Elections and Constitutional Amendments.

SUMMARY

This bill establishes the Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act to be administered by the Secretary of State, which requires each campus of the California Community Colleges (CCCs) and the California State University (CSU), to provide students with specified civic and election dates and information, and designate one person per campus as a Civic and Voter Empowerment Coordinator.

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Student Voter Registration Act which requires the Secretary of State to annually provide every high school, and campus of the CCCs, CSU and University of California (UC) with voter registration forms and information describing eligibility requirements and instructions on how to return the completed form. (Elections Code § 2146)
- 2) Requires every campus of the CCCs and CSU, and requests UC, that operates an automated class registration system to permit students, during the class registration process, to apply to register to vote online by submitting an affidavit of voter registration electronically on the Secretary of State's website. (Elections Code § 2146)
- 3) Requires the CSU and CCC, and requests the UC, to implement a process and the infrastructure to allow a student who enrolls online to submit an affidavit of voter registration electronically on the Secretary of State's website at the time the student enrolls online at each respective segment. (Elections Code § 2147)
- 4) Requires every high school, community college, and CSU to designate a contact person and provide contact information to the Secretary of State in order to facilitate the distribution of voter registration cards. (Elections Code § 2148)

ANALYSIS

This bill:

- 1) Establishes the Student Civic and Voter Empowerment Act (program), and beginning January 1, 2010, requires the Secretary of State, in partnership with the California Community Colleges (CCCs), the California State University (CSU), and the University of California (UC) to implement this program.

Secretary of State

- 2) Requires the Secretary of State to promote and seek to improve student voter registration rates and participation by developing a Students Vote Project to implement the requirements imposed upon campuses by this bill.
- 3) Requires the Secretary of State, through the Students Vote Project, to provide to the CCCs, CSU, and the UC, or campuses thereof, the materials and resources required by this bill, including print calendars with civic- and election-related dates.
- 4) Requires the Secretary of State to establish and maintain a webpage for the Students Vote Project, which is to include the dates and information required to be distributed pursuant to # 7 b) and c).
- 5) Authorizes the social media content in # 7 e) to be furnished, or requested, by the Secretary of State.
- 6) Requires the Secretary of State to evaluate and report to the Legislature, by January 1, 2021, and annually thereafter, the results of the program, including:
 - a) The number of students who registered as a result of the program.
 - b) Statistics relating to the outcome of the program.
 - c) Any other benefits or problems that arose for the program.

Campuses

- 7) Requires each campus of the CCCs and the CSU, and requests each campus of the UC, to do all of the following:
 - a) Designate one person per campus to act as a Civic and Voter Empowerment Coordinator, who is required to implement the requirements of this bill and ensure that each campus holds a minimum of three election outreach events to increase civic learning, democratic participation, civic engagement, and voter turnout.
 - b) In consultation with the Secretary of State, during the first month of each academic semester or quarter and at any time during the summer academic term, distribute campuswide emails to all students providing the

following civic and election dates and information:

- i) National Voter Registration Day, held annually on the fourth Tuesday in September.
 - ii) The last day to register to vote online or to register to vote by mail or in person, specifically the 15th day before a primary or general election.
 - iii) The date when a county may begin to offer early voting at the office of the elections official or at a satellite location, and a statement that the date, times, and locations for early voting and conditional voter registration may be confirmed on the Secretary of State's website or at the county elections office.
 - iv) The primary and general election dates, specifically that a primary election is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March, and a general election is held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.
 - v) A statement that a voter may apply to vote by mail at any time until after the seventh day prior to an election, and that a vote by mail voter may vote in person at the office of the county elections official or at a satellite location established by the county elections official on or before the day of the election.
 - vi) A link to the website of the Secretary of State's Students Vote Project.
- c) In consultation with the Secretary of State, one month before each statewide or special election, distribute by campuswide emails to all students the dates and information specified in i)–vi) above and a website address link or unique Uniform Resource Locator (URL) link furnished by the Secretary of State's office providing all of the following election information:
- i) The Secretary of State's webpage for online voter registration, including a statement providing the last day to register to vote (specifically the 15th day before a primary or general election).
 - ii) The Secretary of State's webpage for election information.
 - iii) The Secretary of State's webpage for the most current voter information guide.
 - iv) The county registrar of voters' sample ballot for the county where the campus is located.
- d) Include in both printed and electronic academic calendars the dates for:

- i) National Voter Registration Day.
 - ii) The last day to register to vote, as specified.
 - iii) The date when a county may begin to offer early voting.
 - iv) The primary and general election dates, as specified.
- e) Post on social media reminders to students, at least one day before each event occurs unless specified otherwise, of all of the following:
- i) The early voting and conditional voter registration information specified above.
 - ii) Election Day, including a reminder the day before and the day of the election. This bill requires the reminders to state that a qualified voter may register to vote on the day of the election at a conditional voter registration site established by the voter's county elections official.
 - iii) After the emails are sent, the voter information guide and county sample ballot information provided in that email.
- f) Requires, during even-numbered years, two of the three events to occur within the final 30 days preceding a statewide primary or general election.
- g) Requires campuses to invite all students to participate in the coordination of and to attend these events.
- h) Authorizes all events to be sponsored by a campus-based student organization.
- i) Requires the Civic and Voter Empowerment Coordinator to be non-partisan.

Miscellaneous

- 8) States legislative intent to establish clear pathways for the Secretary of State to assist public postsecondary education institutions in meeting the voter registration and participation objectives as established in the Elections Code.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, "Public colleges and universities in California are estimated to have 3.1 million students, many of whom face systemic barriers to exercising their political right to vote. Chief among these is the lack of a comprehensive civic education and adequate information about voting. During the 2014 midterms, only 8.2 percent of eligible 18 - 24-year olds voted in the election, one of the lowest rates in the history of our nation. Since many young people become eligible to vote while they are in college, universities

can – an must – play a pivotal role in providing a comprehensive education in democratic engagement.”

- 2) ***Current opportunities to access election-related information.*** Existing law requires every campus of the California Community Colleges (CCC) and California State University (CSU) that operates an automated class registration system, and campuses that allow students to enroll online, to permit students to apply to register to vote online by submitting an affidavit of voter registration electronically on the Secretary of State’s (SOS) Web site. Campuses achieve this by providing a link to the SOS Web site on the college’s online course registration and when students enroll online, whereby students submit an affidavit of voter registration electronically to the SOS.

Several CSU and CCC campuses have had polling places; decisions about where to locate polling places is at the discretion of county elections officials and is based on several factors, including how many voters may access a particular location, accessibility by the entire community, and the distance to neighboring polling places.

This bill requires campuses of the CSU and CCC to distribute campuswide emails and post on social media information related to voter registration, voter education, and elections.

- 3) ***Students Vote Project.*** This bill requires the Secretary of State to promote and seek to improve student voter registration rates and participation by developing a Students Vote Project to implement the requirements imposed upon campuses by this bill. The Students Vote Project already exists at both the high school and collegiate levels. According to information on the Secretary of State’s website, the Students Vote Project is a project of the Secretary of State in partnership with the Lieutenant Governor and a coalition of non-profit organizations to increase civic engagement and voter participation among students. The California Students Vote Project brings together all of the higher education systems to promote a democracy that is more inclusive of student voices, and incorporates an array of resources designed to equip students with the knowledge and tools to be civically engaged in their respective campus. This bill essentially codifies the Students Vote Project.
- 4) ***College Ballot Bowl.*** According to information on the Secretary of State’s website, the Ballot Bowl was developed by the California Students Vote Project in partnership with then-Lieutenant Governor Newsom and a coalition of non-profit organizations. The Secretary of State kicked off the California University and College Ballot Bowl on August 20, 2018. The Ballot Bowl included the CCCs, CSU, University of California, the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities systems. More than 45 public and private institutions participated and together registered more than 10,000 students to vote. This competition is designed to encourage universities and colleges to engage their students in the democratic process and register them to vote. The winners of the inaugural California University and College Ballot Bowl competition is Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, which registered 3,178 students to vote. Could campuswide emails and postings to social media further compel students to be civically

engaged?

- 5) **Existing partnership with California State University.** The California State University (CSU) Office of the Chancellor and the California State Student Association have entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Secretary of State to increase voter engagement by the CSU student body. Within this MOU, the CSU Chancellor commits to taking specified steps, including:
- a) Sending at least one all-campus email regarding voter registration and engagement.
 - b) Encouraging campuses to post social media message leading up to the election that highlight important deadlines.
 - c) Sending out at least one voter registration reminder using the online student portal.

While the CSU already has a MOU that addresses campuswide emails and social media posts, this bill provides a greater level of detail about the information that is to be provided to students. According to the author's office, the Secretary of State's office has indicated that it is unlikely that the MOU would need to be modified to incorporate the requirements of this bill.

- 6) **Designation of staff.** Existing law requires every high school, community college, and CSU to designate a contact person and provide contact information to the Secretary of State in order to facilitate the distribution of voter registration cards. This bill requires each campus of the CSU and California Community Colleges to designate one person per campus to act as a Civic and Voter Empowerment Coordinator, who is required to implement the requirements of this bill and ensure that each campus holds a minimum of three election outreach events to increase civic learning, democratic participation, civic engagement, and voter turnout.
- 7) **Fiscal impact.** According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, this bill would impose:
- a) Ongoing annual Proposition 98 General Fund or General Fund costs totaling about \$1 million for a Civic Voter Empowerment Coordinator at each campus.
 - b) Ongoing General Fund costs to the Secretary of State of about \$220,000 for two positions for the SOS to oversee the program.
 - c) Statewide costs would be between \$130,000 and \$260,000 annually for events.
- 8) **Related legislation.** AB 773 (Gonzalez, 2019) requires the Secretary of the Senate, in coordination with the Superintendent of Public Instruction, to develop educational programming related to voting for local educational agencies to

present to pupils in grade 12 during a presentation on the schoolsite, and requires school districts, county offices of education and charter schools to offer students the opportunity to register or preregister to voting during the presentation. AB 773 is scheduled to be heard in this Committee on June 19.

AB 1036 (Aguiar-Curry, 2019) authorizes the Yolo Elections Office, in partnership with the Yolo County Board of Education, to conduct a High School Voter Education Pilot Program, as specified. AB 1036 is pending in the Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee.

AB 59 (Kalra, 2019) requires an elections official to designate at least one location on each California State University (CSU) campus within the official's jurisdiction as a vote center or satellite office, as specified. AB 59 is pending in the Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee.

- 9) **Prior legislation.** SB 240 (Yee, 2014) would have required county elections officials to establish at least one vote by mail ballot drop box on every campus of the CSU and the University of California (UC), and consider establishing at least one drop box on each community college campus. SB 240 passed the Senate but was never heard in the Assembly.

AB 346 (Atkins, 2011) would have required county elections officials to establish at least one polling place for each state election on a campus of a California Community College, CSU and UC within their respective counties. AB 346 failed passage in the Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee.

SUPPORT

A Band of Voters (sponsor)
 American Civil Liberties Union of California
 California State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
 Courage Campaign
 League of Women Voters
 March For Our Lives California
 Secretary of State
 University of California Student Association
 Young Invincibles

OPPOSITION

None received

-- END --