



DEBRA BOWEN

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE NEWS RELEASE

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Secretary of State Debra Bowen Welcomes New Voting Rights for Emergency Workers, Laments Government Transparency Setbacks

SACRAMENTO – Soon people responding to state emergencies will be able to vote wherever they are serving, thanks to the Governor’s signature on Assembly Bill 1440 (Swanson), which was sponsored by Secretary of State Debra Bowen.

AB 1440 allows emergency personnel responding to a government-declared disaster to cast a provisional ballot for statewide races, legislative races and ballot measures in the county where the emergency occurred. Previously, no person could cast a provisional ballot outside the county where the person was registered to vote.

State and county elections officials scurried last September 1 to get ballots to eligible firefighters and emergency personnel in wildfire zones across the state during California’s 10th Congressional District and 51st Assembly District special elections, after the Governor issued an Executive Order allowing such voting.

“In situations like last summer’s wildfires, firefighters, medics and other responders are sent out with little notice,” said Secretary Bowen, the state’s chief elections officer. “AB 1440 ensures these men and women have the same opportunity to participate in their democracy when they drop everything to protect us.”

Also yesterday, the Governor vetoed several common-sense elections bills sponsored by Secretary of State Bowen and aimed at enhancing government transparency.

AB 84 (Hill) would have allowed vote-by-mail (VBM) voters to find out if their ballots were counted and if not, why not. VBM ballots cannot be counted if they arrive after the polls close on Election Day or if the signature on the ballot envelope does not match the signature on file.

“A similar law already exists for voters who cast provisional ballots, so letting vote-by-mail voters know if their votes counted would have cost little or nothing,” said Secretary Bowen. “If voters knew why their mail-in ballots were not counted, they could make changes that would prevent their votes from being rejected in the future.”

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AB 330 (Saldaña) would have required counties to provide public notice of the opportunity to review the preparation, testing and operation of ballot tabulating devices. Current law requires this testing be open to the public, but it does not require notice of when the testing will occur.

SB 541 (Pavley) would have enhanced transparency by requiring ballot printers and voting system vendors to notify the Secretary of State when they discover previously undisclosed flaws in their products. This bill was spurred in part by the revelation that a voting system software error caused 197 ballots to be inadvertently deleted from Humboldt County's initial results in the November 4 election. Upon discovery of the software error, Humboldt County corrected its election results.

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