

September 16, 2015

The Honorable Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Governor, State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1461 (Gonzalez, Alejo, McCarty) – Request for Signature

Dear Governor Brown,

A well-functioning democracy depends on the participation of its citizens. That is why CALPIRG supports policies that remove barriers to voting. CALPIRG has supported policies to adopt online voter registration, allow for conditional voter registration on Election Day, expand options to vote by mail, and other reforms. We also staff and run the non-partisan New Voters Project here in California to help reach out to young people to encourage them to register and vote. Our comments in particular are focused on our direct experience doing outreach to young voters, particularly students, who are often voting for the very first time in your lives.

According to a study done by UC Davis' Center for Regional Change, in the 2014 midterm general election, youth were registered to vote at the lowest rate of any age group, at 52 percent, compared to above percent for all other age groups.¹ In other words, nearly half of all eligible youth are not even registered to vote. That means that they do not receive information from their local elections official about the upcoming election, nor do they receive any outreach from the campaigns, creating a cycle of neglect.

This is especially concerning because numerous studies have shown that voting is habit forming, and youth who vote while they are young are more likely to become life-long voters. We are very concerned about the abysmally low turnout in the most recent general election, and what that could mean for participation rates in future years.

We should make every effort to facilitate the participation of all citizens in our democracy. In recent years, modern technology has transformed voter registration and voting practices. Since 2012, California has offered online voter registration which established electronic data sharing between the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and the Secretary of State. By July 2016, California is scheduled to launch VoteCal, a new statewide centralized voter registration database that will replace voter registration files currently maintained by each of the state's 58 county elections officials. In addition, this year's budget provided nearly \$2.5 million to establish electronic voter registration at the DMV. We have the technology to register more voters in a more efficient manner.

We understand that during negotiations there was a disagreement on how and where voter information should be captured, such as language preference. The bill was sent to your desk requiring the DMV to

¹ UC Davis Center for Regional Change, "California's New Political Realities: The Impact of the Youth Vote on Our Electoral Landscape," http://explore.regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/copy2_of_UCDavisCCEPPolicyBrief92014YouthVote.pdf

gather this information at the DMV office. We believe that gathering this information at the DMV is the most efficient way to gather the information, as well as critical to language access.

To have engaged and participatory electorate, we acknowledge that voter registration is only the first step and is not a panacea to low voter turnout. It must be complimented by voter outreach and education in order to create an electorate that is engaged and informed. We view automatic voter registration as beneficial not only because it will remove one barrier that prevents individuals from voting, but also because it will result in county elections officials and civic engagement groups like ours to be able to spend more resources on needed outreach, public education, and engagement, instead of voter registration.

AB 1461 will use existing technology to make voter registration more convenient, efficient and accessible. We respectfully request your signature on this important measure.

Sincerely,



Emily Rusch
Executive Director
California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG)
510-844-6803
erusch@calpirg.org

Cc:

Office of the Secretary of State
Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez
Assemblymember Luis Alejo
Assemblymember Kevin McCarty