

BRENNAN
CENTER
FOR JUSTICE

Brennan Center for Justice
at New York University School of Law

161 Avenue of the Americas
12th Floor
New York, NY 10013
646.292.8310 Fax 212.463.7308
www.brennancenter.org

October 9, 2015

Governor Jerry Brown
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 1461 – Request for Signature

Dear Governor Brown:

In 1992, you set forth a prescient call for the government to assume the responsibility of registering eligible Americans and to use available technology to do so. AB 1461 (“California New Motor Voter Program”), which implements automatic registration at DMV offices, would do just that. We respectfully urge you to sign this groundbreaking legislation.

The Brennan Center for Justice¹ is a non-partisan law and policy institute that seeks to improve our systems of democracy and justice. We work on a range of issues pertaining to voting rights and elections. With respect to voter registration, in particular, we have published numerous studies and reports, and have successfully worked with a wide variety of stakeholders to modernize voter registration in states across the country.

California has more eligible but unregistered voters than any other state: with nearly 7 million eligible Californians not registered to vote, the Golden State ranks 38th in the country in registration rate. AB 1461 will make a huge dent in this problem, and will provide numerous other benefits for both government officials and citizens.

Specifically, the New Motor Voter Program would create a seamless and efficient voter registration system by transferring voter registration information electronically and by making registration automatic unless a person declines to register. This process is obviously more convenient for voters, but the streamlined and automatic process also frees up DMV staff to effectively focus on customer interaction and perform the other duties of their job. There is an additional benefit: the electronic transfer of voter registration information from DMVs to election officials has been shown to save money in the processing of registration forms, and to result in voter rolls that are cleaner and more accurate.

¹ This testimony has been prepared by a Center affiliated with New York University School of Law, but does not purport to present the school’s institutional views, if any.

As with any new initiative, implementation will be critical. It is important that national experts work with the DMV and election officials to ensure that this reform is undertaken efficiently, responsibly, and without posing undue burdens on agencies. Our extensive studies of other similar programs demonstrate, however, that modernized registration procedures can be installed smoothly, with fewer costs and fewer complications than the antiquated systems they replace. Institutional inertia should not stand in the way of needed reforms—as you yourself argued in 1992.

Oregon, with the leadership of Governor Kate Brown, became the first state to make voter registration automatic earlier this year. New Jersey’s legislature followed suit by passing a bill last summer, but Governor Chris Christie is standing in the way of progress by not signing the bill. The eyes of the nation are now on California. Editorial boards from coast to coast have endorsed this much-needed reform, including the *Boston Globe*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*. We very much hope that you will continue your legacy of leadership on voting rights by signing this bill and putting the Golden State at the forefront of election administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Waldman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Waldman
President
Brennan Center for Justice