



June 7, 2024

The Honorable Catherine Blakespear  
Chair, Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee  
1020 N Street, Room 533  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Assembly Bill 884 (Low) - Elections: language accessibility.  
As Amended January 22, 2024 – OPPOSE UNLESS AMENDED  
Awaiting to be heard in the Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee**

Dear Senator Blakespear,

On behalf of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), and the Urban Counties of California (UCC), we write to share our respectful opposition to Assembly Bill (AB) 884 by Assembly Member Low unless amended to include an annual appropriation in the state budget act for county implementation and ongoing compliance to address the significant added costs imposed upon counties.

Counties believe in efficient and accessible voting for all. Our strength as a state and a country is derived from the diversity of our communities. The voices of all Californians are needed to express the people's will in its truest form. While we acknowledge the value of expanding ballot language accessibility, our concerns are primarily due to the considerable costs that would be imposed on elections officials and the lack of a funding plan to pay for those costs. Election officials perform the difficult work of conducting free and fair elections despite stretched budgets, limited staffing, and frequent changes to election laws. While it is difficult to estimate the full extent of costs imposed on counties given lack of readily available data, AB 884 would more than double the language services costs and demand on labor, materials, and contracted services in at least some counties.

This bill creates a new state-mandated local program. While counties are required to comply with all state mandates, counties only receive funding to carry out a select group of state-mandated programs in the form of after-the-fact reimbursement payments from the state. Counties comply with all other state mandates using local revenues. After a bill is signed into law, reimbursement for counties to comply with state-mandated programs is not automatic. Rather, counties initiate the process to receive reimbursement via the Commission on State Mandates, which may take a year or more to determine whether the new law meets the criteria for reimbursement—and even longer to establish a process and rate for reimbursement. Therefore, counties comply with new laws pending reimbursement status, often funding these programs alone for years, facing the uncertainty of reimbursement. In fact, according to the State Controller's Office, the state has accumulated a backlog of \$72.5 million in unpaid reimbursement claims owned to counties for costs incurred to comply with state-mandated programs and requirements to conduct elections.

Compounding these fiscal constraints for counties, the state has suspended some mandated programs to address state budget deficits. While a mandate is suspended, the requirement remains in statute, but local governments are not required to comply with the law in that fiscal year and the state has no reimbursement obligation.

However, to meet the expectations of the public and continue an existing level of service for the community, counties often continue to perform and pay for suspended state-mandated programs. This cost-shifting pattern wherein the state acknowledges fiscal responsibility for a program, the public subsequently expects and relies on that program, and then the state suspends funding has added pressure and needless complications to the management of elections by counties for years. Included below are three examples of existing suspended mandates that many counties continue to perform in the interest of the public good and promoting access to the democratic process although they no longer receive reimbursement from the state:

- [Absentee Ballots](#). *Mandate:* Absentee ballots shall be available to any registered voter. *Status:* Suspended.
- [Permanent Absent Voters II](#). *Mandate:* County elections officials shall make an application for permanent absent voter status available to any voter. *Status:* Suspended.
- [Voter Identification Procedures](#) *Mandate:* Elections officials shall compare the signature on each provisional ballot envelope with the signature on the voter's affidavit of registration. *Status:* Suspended.

To quote the Legislative Analyst's Office, which [opined](#) on this exact topic a few years ago, "...the process the state uses to achieve its local elections priorities—the mandates process—simply has not worked."

After years of layered responsibilities for county elections officials and insufficient financial support from the state, CSAC urges the Legislature to pair all new requirements with an appropriation in the state budget act for county implementation.

It is for these reasons that CSAC, RCRC, and UCC must respectfully oppose AB 884 unless amended, and respectfully request your "NO" vote. Should you have any questions about our position, please contact us at the email addresses below.

Sincerely,



**Eric Lawyer**  
Legislative Advocate  
[elawyer@counties.org](mailto:elawyer@counties.org)  
CSAC



**Jean Kinney Hurst**  
Legislative Advocate  
[jkh@hbeadvocacy.com](mailto:jkh@hbeadvocacy.com)  
UCC



**Sarah Dukett**  
Policy Advocate  
[sdukett@rcrcnet.org](mailto:sdukett@rcrcnet.org)  
RCRC

cc: The Honorable Evan Low, California State Assembly  
Members, Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee  
Scott Matsumoto, Principal Consultant, Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee  
Cory Botts, Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus