



Senator Anthony Portantino
Senate Committee on Appropriations
State Capitol, Room 412
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Portantino and Committee Members:

Tusk Philanthropies strongly supports the passage of Senate Bill 1480, which would permit a voter with a qualifying disability to use a certified remote accessible vote-by-mail system and return a completed ballot electronically. This legislation will address the needs of thousands of California voters with disabilities and make elections in California more accessible.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that citizens with disabilities have equal access to voting independently and privately, including when registering to vote and casting a ballot. Despite having passed over 30 years ago, significant barriers to voting persist for California voters with disabilities. Voting by mail is designed to make voting easier and more convenient for all voters, but traditional mail voting is inaccessible for voters with visual and other print disabilities that prevent them from independently reading, marking, and handling a paper ballot. As a result, many voters are forced to rely on assistance from others in order to mark, sign, and return a ballot, thus violating their right to an independent and private vote as guaranteed by the ADA.

Senate Bill 1480 addresses this inequality and would make California's elections accessible and compliant with the ADA. The bill would provide voters with visual and other print disabilities the ability to receive, mark, and cast their ballot from a computer or smartphone, using their own assistive technology to vote independently and privately. The bill is modeled after similar legislation enacted in other states, including Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, North Dakota, Utah, and West Virginia. It is long past time for California to join those other states in offering a fully accessible absentee voting system. By improving current law, the Legislature can ensure voters with disabilities can safely cast a ballot and know it was cast as intended.

The technology to enable digital voting is not new. Hundreds of jurisdictions across ten states have piloted digital voting since 2018. Our organization has partnered with the National Cybersecurity Center and the National Federation of the Blind to provide grant funding to jurisdictions to support accessible mobile voting pilots. We've funded over 20 pilot elections in seven states, and independent post-election audits affirmed that ballots submitted electronically were secure. The system replicates the traditional mail voting process on a digital device, enabling voters to access, mark, sign, verify and cast their ballots from a computer or mobile device. This added convenience has proven to increase participation among those eligible voters. A study of a similar pilot program in the state of West Virginia found as much as a 5% increase in participation among military and overseas voters when digital voting was offered.

California has the opportunity to improve existing voting options and make elections more accessible. Remote accessible digital voting will help make that possible, and we strongly urge you to support the passage of SB 1480.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Bucaro, Director of Mobile Voting

Tusk Philanthropies