



June 22, 2016

The Honorable Shirley Weber, Chair
Assembly Committee on Elections and Redistricting
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 450 (Allen/Hertzberg) – SUPPORT as amended June 21st

Dear Assemblymember Weber,

Consumer Watchdog strongly supports SB 450 (Allen/Hertzberg), which will allow California to take the next crucial steps to modernize elections and increase democratic participation. The bill will provide voters with more options regarding when, how, and where they cast their ballot.

Turnout of registered voters in California has steadily eroded and many eligible voters fail to register due to lack of access and opportunity. The numbers bear repeating: Statewide turnout of eligible voters was just 31% in the November 2014 election, with only 8% of youth showing up at the polls. Despite widespread interest in the recent presidential primary, and actual spikes in voter registration, turnout this month did not exceed average numbers.

SB 450 would enact several key reforms that have proven to increase participation, improve election administration, and save money.

The bill would allow California counties, beginning in 2018, to begin conducting elections in a new way. A similar system used in Colorado has already proven to increase turnout while reducing administrative costs. It would reduce barriers for voters, including:

Extended period to vote: Every registered voter will receive a ballot a month before Election Day and can start voting a month before. Voters may mail their ballot back, drop it at a voter drop-box or at any vote center in their county;

Weekend voting: Every voter can vote in-person at least 10 days before Election Day, which includes 2 weekends;

More convenient voting locations: Voters can use any vote center in their county to cast a ballot. Many of these vote centers will be in more convenient locations, for example near a voter's workplace or school;

Greater language access: Every vote center will provide translated materials and assistance in the languages protected by the federal Voting Rights Act;

Greater disabled access: Every vote center will have accessible voting machines to assist voters with physical impairments to vote on their own, and any voter can request an accessible ballot, including ballots necessary for the visually impaired;

Same Day Voter Registration: Every vote center will have to provide same-day voter registration which allows citizens to register to vote or update their registration information until the close of the polls on Election Day;

Direct public participation: The public will have an unprecedented voice in how elections are run, including formal consultation on the location and number of vote centers and ballot drop boxes.

Recent amendments to SB 450 adjust for the reality of elections in California but do not stray too far from the goal: Reducing barriers to when, where and how Californians vote.

No magic wand or single solution can increase democratic participation in California, however SB 450 contains many that are considered the gold standard of election reform. We urge your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carmen Balber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Carmen Balber
Executive Director