

# AB 30 (PRICE) VOTER "PRE-REGISTRATION" FOR 16 AND 17 YEAR OLDS

## PROBLEM

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According to the Secretary of State, more than 7.2 million eligible voters in California are not registered to vote – nearly one-third of California's eligible voters. Among young voters, participation is even lower – according to data from the U.S. Census, more than 45 percent of eligible voters in California between 18 and 24 years of age were not registered to vote in 2004 (the most recent data available). Furthermore, while participation by younger voters has increased in the last few elections, California is ranked just 36th in the nation for turnout among young voters.

Research shows that people who get involved in the political process at a young age are much more likely to become lifelong voters, so facilitating participation by younger voters can have positive long term effects on overall voter participation.

The state has taken some important steps to encourage participation by younger voters – for instance, the Secretary of State worked with *Rock the Vote* to create a "birthday card" program where voter registration cards are mailed to more than 30,000 Californians each month on their 18th birthday. However, it is imperative that the state do everything possible to encourage participation by California's young voters.

## EXISTING LAW

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Existing law permits a person to register to vote if he or she is a citizen, a resident of California, not in prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony, and at least 18 years of age at the time of the next election.

## THIS BILL

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AB 30 allows a person to register to vote once he or she is 16 years of age if that person otherwise complies with all other requirements to register to vote. A 16 year old would complete the same voter registration form as any other person, but the registration would not be effective until the voter turned 18. Once a voter reaches 18 years of age, his or her registration would be activated, and the voter would receive a sample ballot and other election materials for the first election in which he or she is eligible to vote.

To minimize the costs of AB 30, this bill would not be implemented until the Secretary of State certifies a statewide voter registration database that complies with the requirements of the federal Help America Vote Act.

## BACKGROUND

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At least nine other states currently permit pre-registration by individuals who have not yet reached voting age. Both Hawaii and Florida allow 16 year olds to pre-register to vote.

Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Wisconsin, Missouri, Oregon and Texas all permit pre-registration by 17 year olds.

At the federal level, Congressman Edward Markey introduced H.R. 4972 – the "Gateway to Democracy Act" – in 2004. While this bill was never debated on the floor, it would have allowed a teenager to pre-register to vote if he or she was old enough to get a driver's license.

## RELATED LEGISLATION

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AB 2371 (Coto) which was introduced in 2008, would have automatically registered a person to vote when he or she applied for a driver's license

or state identification card or files a tax return unless that person opts-out. If the person who was applying for a driver's license or filing a tax return was not yet 18 years old, AB 2371 would have resulted in that person being automatically registered to vote once they had reached 18 years of age.

ACA 15 (Mullin) allows a 17 year old to register to vote and vote in a primary or special election if he or she will be 18 years old by the time of the next general election.

## **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

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**Q: What programs currently exist in California to encourage young people to register to vote?**

**A:** California already has a “birthday card” program where voter registration cards are mailed to more than 30,000 18 year olds each month on their 18th birthdays.

Additionally, California annually distributes voter registration cards to high schools, colleges and universities for distribution to students, and California's public colleges and universities are transitioning to a system that allows students to register to vote when they register for classes.

**Q: What is the cost to the state?**

**A:** The cost of lowering the voter registration age to 16 should be minimal. Current voter registration methods are not affected, only the legal age for voter registration would be changed.

Additionally, AB 30 delays implementation of the voter pre registration until the Secretary of State certifies a statewide voter registration database that complies with the requirements of the federal Help America Vote Act. Additionally, the new voter registration database will allow the Secretary of State to change the minimum age of

voter registration without requiring any modifications to the database.

**Q: Does the state's voter registration database have the capacity to include registrations from 16 and 17 year olds?**

**A:** Yes. California currently has about 15.7 million registered voters. If every eligible 16 and 17 year old chose to register to vote immediately once AB 30 became effective, that would result in an increase of about one million voters.

As noted above, the state is in the process of updating its statewide voter registration database, and AB 30 will not go into effect until that database is in place. The new database will have the capacity, at a minimum, to hold registration records for 30 million voters, and will have the capacity to be expanded, with the addition of hardware only, to accommodate 100 million voters. As such, the voter registration database will have more than enough capacity to accommodate the registrations of 16 and 17 year olds.

## **SUPPORT**

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New America Foundation (sponsor)

## **OPPOSITION**

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None received at this time