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June 1, 2015

The Honorable Ben Allen
State Capitol, Room 2054
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Bill 439 – Conditional Voter Registration & Ballot On-Demand - SUPPORT

Dear Senator Allen,

On behalf of California Common Cause and our members, I am writing with a letter of support for Senate Bill 439, which permits county elections officials to offer conditional voter registration and provisional voting at satellite offices during the entire 14 days immediately preceding Election Day, and establishes criteria for the use of ballot-on-demand printing systems.

Only 18 percent of eligible Californians cast ballots in the June 2014 state primary election – the lowest voter turnout rate in nearly one century. There are many reasons why Californians do not vote, including lack of voter engagement and cynicism; however, according to a March 2015 PPIC survey, the top reason registered voters gave for not voting was being too busy or lacking the time to vote. SB 439 will help combat the trend of ever-decreasing voter turnout by providing citizens with more accessible and convenient options for registering to vote and actually voting.

Under current law, set to go into effect in 2017 when VoteCal is operational, citizens are already able to register and vote at a county registrar's permanent offices up to 14 days prior to an election. This bill allows counties to offer this same service from any satellite offices they establish during the elections period, which has the potential to greatly increase voting site accessibility.

Ballot-on-demand systems allow county officials to print customized ballots upon request, which can enable voters to vote from almost any polling location, rather than just their traditional precinct. Ballot-on-demand systems are already legal and in-use in California; for example, such a system has been successfully piloted in Sacramento County to serve military and overseas voters. However, the permitting process is cumbersome and approved on a county-by-county (and location-by-location) basis. Having the Secretary of State establish standards for ballot-on-demand systems and requiring them to undergo certification will promote the integrity of this technology and speed up its adoption.

For all of these reasons, California Common Cause strongly supports SB 439 and we look forward to working with your office on this bill. We hope that you will look to our organization if you need further assistance.

Please contact me at nheidorn@commoncause.org or (916) 520-4070 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Nicolas Heidorn
Policy and Legislative Counsel
California Common Cause