

July 13, 2010

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor, State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 1342, Precinct Sizes/Polling Places

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

This letter is to respectfully request your signature on Senate Bill 1342 relative to precinct size and resource allocation at polling places.

Senate Bill 1342 allows local elections officials to take into account the rising number of permanent vote-by-mail (PVM) voters in California when determining precinct size and polling place locations.

Under existing law, precinct size is capped at 1,000 voters per precinct without regard to the number of PVM voters (as contrasted with election day walk-in voters). The number of voters is capped at 1,000 whether ten percent, fifty percent or ninety percent of a precinct's voters are PVM. The net result is long lines at polling places with very few PVM voters and a misallocation of poll workers and resources at other polling places with a high percentage of PVM voters and few walk in voters.

Moreover, under existing state law, voters in precincts where election day walk-ins are modest in number may find that no polling place is provided and they are *forced* to use vote-by-mail.

Senate Bill 1342 is not a mandate, but simply allows counties to shift precinct boundaries within a county, from areas with high concentrations of PVM voters to areas with lower concentrations, and equalize the number of “walk-in” voters that are served by each polling place within a jurisdiction.

There are currently close to six million voters registered as permanent vote-by-mail (about 33% of the statewide total). This growing trend needs to be taken into account when determining precinct size.

In my own precinct in Palo Alto, for example, only a handful of voters still show up on election day to vote at the local polling place. As a result, the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters notified me and my neighbors that because of the small number of walk-in voters in my precinct, our polling place would close and we would be forced to vote by mail. The problem is widespread; in 2008 in Santa Clara County alone, more than 86,000 voters were similarly obliged to vote by mail whether they wanted to or not.

Senate Bill 1342 allows local elections officials to adjust the maximum size of various precincts in order to “average out” the actual election day turnout throughout the jurisdiction. It gives locals the control to equalize and make adjustments in resources as they see fit, rather than have to eliminate services on election day, or misallocate resources.

This measure was proposed to me by a pair of my constituents (one in Santa Clara County and one in San Mateo County) as part of my annual “There Oughta Be a Law” contest; and received broad bi-partisan support in both the Senate and the Assembly. To my knowledge, **there is no opposition to the bill**, and I respectfully request your signature on SB 1342.

Sincerely,

S. Joseph Simitian
State Senator, 11th District