



CONSENT CALENDAR
March 30, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmembers Rigel Robinson and Sophie Hahn
Subject: Support of AB 37: Vote-by-Mail Ballots

RECOMMENDATION

Send a letter to Assemblymember Marc Berman, Senator Nancy Skinner, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks in support of Assembly Bill 37, which would require counties to send vote-by-mail ballots to all voters for every election.

BACKGROUND

AB 37, introduced by Assemblymember Berman, would expand the requirement put in place for all California counties to send each eligible voter a mail-in ballot for the November 3, 2020 election to all elections. It maintains the parameters for the distribution and tracking of vote-by-mail ballots implemented for the 2020 General Election, with the addendum that if a better system for tracking mail-in ballots is discovered, it may be implemented.

The 2020 General Election saw historic voter turnout nationwide, with roughly two-thirds of eligible voters submitting ballots.¹ This was largely due to the record numbers of vote-by-mail ballots distributed by states. In California, 86.72% of ballots cast were vote-by-mail ballots.² This unprecedented level of mail-in ballot usage was primarily due to the pandemic, but it reveals the potential for a fairer system of voting in California. For many, accessing polling places on Election Day is inconvenient, costly, or simply impossible. This inconvenience disproportionately affects minority communities. According to a study by the American Bar, 15% of Black voters reported difficulties accessing a polling place, compared to only 5% of white voters.³ By mailing all registered voters a ballot, the State of California can increase voter turnout and ensure that more voices are heard by our government. The states of Oregon and Washington already mail each eligible voter a ballot, and studies have shown that these states have seen increased voter turnout without increased fraud or partisan advantage.⁴

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/01/28/turnout-soared-in-2020-as-nearly-two-thirds-of-eligible-u-s-voters-cast-ballots-for-president/>

² <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/historical-absentee>

³ https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/voting-in-2020/why-minority-voters-have-a-lower-voter-turnout/

⁴ <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/washington-was-a-vote-by-mail-pioneer-now-other-states-are-following-suit-amid-coronavirus/>

As a city dedicated to citizen participation and democracy, the City of Berkeley should support this bill by sending a letter of support to Assemblymember Marc Berman, Senator Nancy Skinner, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

No impact.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Rigel Robinson, (510) 981-7170
Arev Walker, Intern

Attachments:

- 1: Letter of support
- 2: Bill text

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB37

March 30, 2021

The Honorable Marc Berman
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 3123
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: City of Berkeley's Support of AB 37

Dear Assemblymember Berman,

The Berkeley City Council would like to convey its full support for Assembly Bill 37.

The 2020 General Election saw historic voter turnout nationwide, with roughly two-thirds of eligible voters submitting ballots. This was largely due to the record numbers of vote-by-mail ballots distributed by states. In California, 86.72% of ballots cast were vote-by-mail ballots. This unprecedented level of mail-in ballot usage was primarily due to the pandemic, but it reveals the potential for a fairer system of voting in California.

For many, accessing polling places on Election Day is inconvenient, costly, or simply impossible. By mailing all registered voters a ballot, California can increase voter turnout and ensure that more voices are heard by our government. The states of Oregon and Washington mail each eligible voter a ballot, and studies have shown that these states have seen increased voter turnout without increased fraud or partisan advantage.

AB 37 is an essential step along the way to making voting more accessible for all Californians, and we thank you for introducing this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

The Berkeley City Council

CC: Senator Nancy Skinner
Assemblymember Buffy Wicks

