

GET INVOLVED!

*How Our Government Works &
How To Make Government Work For You*

BOOK THREE: VOTING



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Adapted for Area Board 6, 2004



Area 4 Board is a federally-funded state agency that protects and advocates for the rights of people who have developmental disabilities and their families in Napa, Solano, and Sonoma Counties.

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Questions and comments may be directed to:

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GET INVOLVED!

*How Our Government Works &
How To Make Government Work For You*

BOOK ONE : HOW OUR GOVERNMENT WORKS

What Can Government Do For You?
What Can You Do For Your Government?
How Our Government is Set Up

BOOK TWO: HOW TO MAKE GOVERNMENT WORK FOR YOU

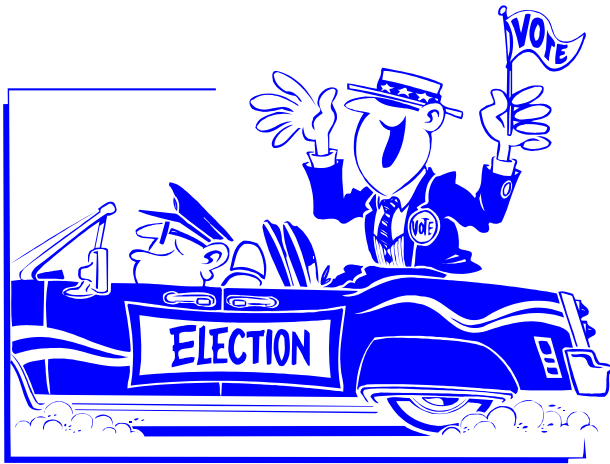
TALKING WITH YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES
How You Can Get Involved
Writing to Your Representative
Meeting With Your Representative
Where to Write or Meet with Your Representative

BOOK THREE: VOTING

Why Vote??
Who Can Vote?
How Do I Register to Vote?
What Happens After I Register?
How Do I Vote?
 Polling Place
 Accessibility at Polling Places
 Absentee Ballot
If You Need Help with Voting...
Where to Get More Information about Voting

BOOK FOUR: WORDS TO KNOW

Words to Know



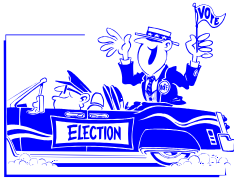
WHY VOTE??

You know you can advocate to tell your elected representatives what's important to you and ask them to help you. Another way to try to influence what the government does is by *voting*.

When you vote, you are letting your elected representatives know what is important to you and whether or not you think they are doing a good job. If you like what your representative has been doing and he or she is trying to get elected again, you can vote for him or her. If you don't like what he or she has been doing, you can vote for someone else to be your representative. When you vote, you tell your representatives what is important to you, and you influence who works in the government and what they do. You can also vote about new laws and whether taxes should be raised to pay for certain projects.

The time when you can vote is called an *election*. Elections are held at least every two years, and sometimes more often. When you vote for who you want your representative to be, there are usually several choices. The people who want to become a representative are called *candidates*. You can vote for the candidate who is concerned about the same things you are. Besides voting for who you want your representative to be, you can vote for or against new laws. The laws that are proposed (suggested) are called *propositions*.

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WHY VOTE??

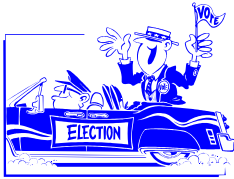
There are three basic types of elections: primary, general, and local. Sometimes there are also "special elections" which are limited to one specific purpose (like raising taxes for schools or picking a new representative if the previous one quits before their term is finished).

A *primary election* is held before a general election. In California, primary elections are usually held in June. The purpose of a primary election is for the members of political parties (like Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Greens, etc.) to nominate, or choose, the candidates from their party who will be voted on in the general election. Only candidates who run for state or national office are nominated by political parties in a primary election.

A *general election* is held to make the final choice among candidates who have been nominated by political parties or who are running as independent (not a member of a political party). Propositions (suggested new laws) are also voted on in a general election. General elections are held in November in even-numbered years.

Local elections are held to make decisions for cities, counties, schools, and special districts. There is no set time or method that applies to all local elections. Registered voters receive a sample ballot (see page 37) that tells you the candidates for local offices and if there are any local laws or decisions that you can vote on. Candidates for local offices are not nominated by political parties.

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WHY VOTE??

In California, there are eight official political parties:

American Independent
Democratic Party
Green Party
Libertarian Party
Natural Law Party
Peace and Freedom Party
Reform Party
Republican Party

A political party is a group of people who work together to try to win elections and run government. When you register to vote, you can pick a political party whose ideas you agree with, or you don't have to pick a party if you're not sure which one to pick. You can get information about each political party from the California Secretary of State's office:

Secretary of State
Elections Division
1500 11th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-9910
(916) 657-2166
<http://www.ss.ca.gov>



WHO CAN VOTE?

To vote in California, you must be:

- * at least 18 years old on the day of the next election;
- * a citizen of the United States;
- * a resident of California;
- * not in prison or on parole for a felony conviction;
- * not declared by a court to be mentally incompetent to vote; and
- * you must be registered (signed up) to vote.

These are the only requirements that you must meet to be able to register to vote. It does not matter if you live in a group home or a state developmental center. It does not matter if you cannot read or write English or any other language. If you meet the requirements listed above, you have the right to vote!

Some people think they cannot vote if they have a conservator. This is often wrong! A judge would have to say specifically that you cannot vote. The judge may have said that you are "mentally incompetent" to drive a car or carry a gun, but you may still have the competence, or ability, to vote. Remember only a judge can say that you can't vote. If you have a conservator and you are not sure if you can vote or not, check with your conservator.

HOW DO I REGISTER TO VOTE?



To be able to vote, you have to register. To register to vote, you only need to fill out a card that has a few questions. You will need to know: your name, address, birthdate, the state or foreign country where you were born. There are a few other questions on the card that you can choose to either answer or leave blank. You need to sign the form. If you need help to fill out a voter registration card, you can ask someone to help you. There is no cost to register to vote.

If you can't sign your name, here's what to do: make an "X" or whatever mark you can make in the signature box on the registration form. Have someone witness your mark by signing their name and writing down the date. Your witness should put parentheses around your "X" or other mark and write your full name and that this is your mark (for example: "John Q. Voter's mark").

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HOW DO I REGISTER TO VOTE?

There are many places you can go to register to vote: libraries, fire stations, post offices, DMV (Department of Motor Vehicle) or by calling the Registrar of Voters in your county.

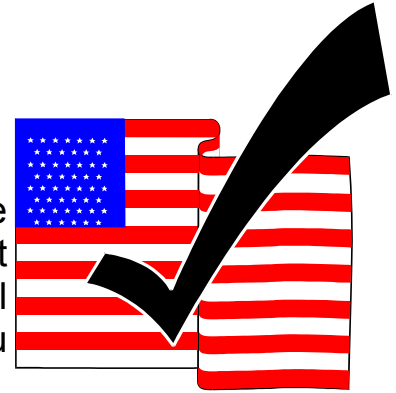
You can get voter registration information online too. Go to:
<http://www.ss.ca.gov>

To be able to vote in an election, you must register to vote 29 days before the election. You need to register again if you have moved or changed your name (if you got married and changed your name, for example) since the last election.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I REGISTER?

SAMPLE BALLOT

After you register to vote, a *sample ballot* will be mailed to you about two weeks before the next election. A sample ballot looks exactly like the real ballot you will use when you vote. It is sent to you from your County Clerk or Registrar of Voters.



Your sample ballot will tell you where and when to vote, if the place you can go to vote is accessible, and how to use the voting machine. All of the candidates and propositions you can vote on will be listed in your sample ballot. There may be statements from the candidates for local offices, like city council members or school board members. There will also be information about the measures (proposed local laws or new taxes) you can vote on.

You can write on your sample ballot. You should think about the candidates, propositions, and measures and decide how you want to vote before you go to vote.

BALLOT PAMPHLET

About the same time you get your sample ballot, you will also get a *ballot pamphlet* from the California Secretary of State. The ballot pamphlet is a booklet that lists the propositions you can vote on in the next election. There are written arguments for and against each proposition and information about the costs if the proposition became law. You can use the ballot pamphlet to help you decide how to vote on propositions.

HOW DO I VOTE?

There are two ways you can vote. You can either go to a polling place on election day, or you can vote using an absentee ballot.

POLLING PLACE

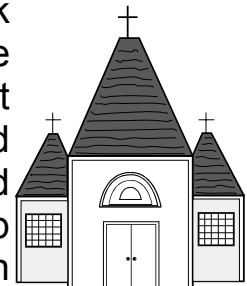
A polling place is where you can go to vote on election day. Your polling place may be at a church, a school, in someone's garage, or another place close to where you live. Your sample ballot will tell you where your polling place is and if it is accessible (see page 40 for information about accessibility).



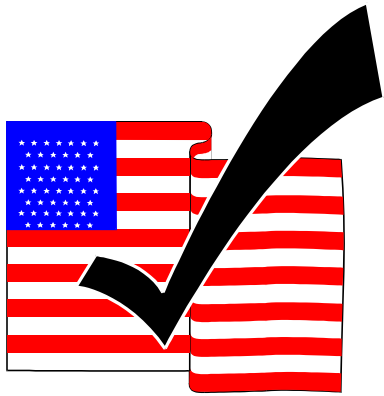
When you go to vote at a polling place, you can take a friend to help you. You should also take your sample ballot with you. You should decide which candidates you want to vote for and how you want to vote on the propositions *before* you go to your polling place.



At the polling place, one of the poll workers will ask you for your address. They'll check their list to make sure you are registered to vote and that you are voting in the right place. The poll worker will ask you to sign your name and write your address. Then they will give you your ballot and direct you to a booth. You can take up to two people to help you in the booth. The poll workers will ask you to take an oath (swear that you do need help).



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HOW DO I VOTE??

Different polling places have different ways to mark ballots. Your sample ballot will tell you how to mark your ballot at your polling place. You are allowed to stay in the polling booth for 10 minutes. If no other voters are waiting to use your polling booth, the poll workers can give you more time. If you make a mistake on your ballot, you can ask the poll worker for another ballot.

When you're done marking your ballot, you give it to a poll worker. The poll worker will tear stubs off your ballot and give them to you, put your ballot in the ballot box, and give you a sticker that says "I Voted!"

ACCESSIBILITY AT POLLING PLACES



If you need an accessible polling place or an adaptive device, here are some things that could help you:

- * **Wheelchair Accessible Booths** - Some polling places have booths that are big enough for most wheelchairs to fit in, and the voting machine is lower so voters in a wheelchair can easily reach it.

- * **Curbside Voting** - If your polling place is not accessible or does not have a wheelchair accessible booth, you can ask to do curbside voting. A poll worker will bring a ballot and a punching device to mark the ballot to the curb or parking lot close to the polling place. The poll worker can help you mark your ballot if you need help. When you're done marking your ballot, the poll worker will take your ballot and put it in the ballot box.

- * **Large Type Instructions or Magnifiers** - Some polling places have voting instructions written in large type or magnifying devices to help voters who have visual impairments. At some polling places, the poll workers will read the instructions to you if you need this help.

- * **Large and Small Handle Styluses and Pencil Grips** - Some polling places have these devices to help voters who cannot use a regular stylus to punch their ballot.

- * **Absentee Ballot** - With an absentee ballot, you can vote from your home. Keep reading for more information about absentee ballots.

To find out if your polling place is accessible and what kinds of adaptive devices are available, you can call the Registrar of Voters in your county

ABSENTEE BALLOT



Instead of going to a polling place on election day, some people use an absentee ballot to vote. With an absentee ballot, your ballot is mailed to you and you can either mail it back to the Registrar of Voters or you can drop it off at a polling place on election day.

Anyone who is registered to vote can ask for an absentee ballot. If you want to use an absentee ballot, you have to fill out a short application form that is on the back of your sample ballot. You have to ask for an absentee ballot before each election. If you want an absentee ballot, you must ask for it at least 7 days before the election.

If you have a disability, you can sign up for *Permanent Absentee Voter Status*. As a Permanent Absentee Voter, you will be automatically sent an absentee ballot for elections in the future. To sign up for permanent absentee voting, call your Registrar of Voters and ask them to send you the Permanent Absentee Voter Status form.

There are several reasons why you might like using an absentee ballot instead of going to a polling place:

- * Some polling places are not accessible or do not have the adaptive device you need;
- * If you are away on vacation or you don't have time to vote on election day, you can mark your absentee ballot anytime before election day;
- * You don't have to worry about transportation to get to your polling place falling through; and
- * If you need help to vote, you don't have to worry about arranging for a friend or helper to go with you on election day.



IF YOU NEED HELP WITH VOTING...

If you need help going through your sample ballot and thinking about how you want to vote, you can:

- * read the sample ballot and the ballot pamphlet that are mailed to you. The pamphlets list all the things you can vote on in the next election, there are statements written by some of the candidates, and arguments for and against propositions. If you need help reading, you can ask family, friends, or your personal assistant (attendant) to help you.
- * talk with your family, friends, or neighbors and ask them how they plan to vote and why;
- * listen to the news or read the newspaper. As it gets close to an election, there are usually many stories on TV, radio, and in the newspaper about different candidates and propositions.
- * sometimes there are *candidate forums*, where people who are trying to get elected talk about their plans, their experiences and why they think they would do a good job. You could go to a candidate forum or watch it if it's on TV (if candidate forums are on TV, they're often on a local cable channel). To find out about candidate forums, you can look at the TV listings in the newspaper or call the League of Women Voters.
- * see if there is a self advocacy group or People First group near you that will be talking about candidates and propositions (you can call Area 6 Board to find out about the nearest People First group).

So to help you decide how to vote, you can get information and talk with friends, family, and others. But the final decision about how to vote is up to *you*. No one should tell you how to vote. It's your decision and your vote.



WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VOTING

California Secretary of State

1500 11th Street

Sacramento, CA 95814

(916) 657-2166

(800) 345-VOTE Voter Registration Hotline

(800) 833-8683 For Hearing and Speech Impaired Only

e-mail address: comments@ss.ca.gov

Internet address: <http://www.ss.ca.gov>

Contact the Secretary of State's office for information about elections, propositions, and political parties.

League of Women Voters

926 J Street, Suite 1000

Sacramento, CA 95814

(916) 442-7215

(916)442-7362 FAX

Internet address: <http://ca.lwv.org/>

The League of Women Voters has an extensive list of publications covering government, voting, political action, and natural resources. Most publications cost \$1.00-\$5.00. The Publications Catalog is available at no charge. The League also conducts or assists with organizing candidates' forums.