



May 12, 2022

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
 Governor, State of California
 1021 O Street, Suite 9000
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Toni Atkins
 Senate President pro Tempore
 1021 O St., Ste. 8518
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
 Speaker of the Assembly
 1021 O St., Ste. 8330
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
 Senate Budget Chair
 1021 O St., Ste. 8630
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Phil Ting
 Assembly Budget Chair
 1021 O St., Ste. 8230
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Wendy Carrillo
 Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 4
 1021 O St., Ste. 5730
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Sydney Kamlager
 Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 4
 1021 O St., Ste. 6510
 Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: 2022-2023 Proposed \$85 Million Budget for Voter Education and Outreach

Dear Governor Newsom, Senate President pro Tempore Atkins, Speaker Rendon, and Chairs Ting, Skinner, Carrillo and Kamlager:

We write to urge you to support a [Legislative Budget Request for 2022-2023](#), to provide state funding for voter education and outreach, that is co-championed by Assemblymembers Cecilia Aguiar-Curry and Mike Fong and signed by fifteen additional legislators, including both current and former chairs of the Assembly and Senate Elections Committees and the Assembly Majority leader. We also wish to express our appreciation to Chair Carrillo for her support of this request.

Furthermore, we support Assemblymember Aguiar-Curry's separate \$15 million budget ask for funds that would allow the Secretary of State to make grants to county registrars for programs that integrate voter registration and preregistration with civic education for high school students and programs that increase voter registration within the county's underrepresented communities, consistent with the goals of [AB 2576](#).

Despite recent legislative changes designed to remove impediments to voting in California, and a historically high voter turnout in the November 2020 election,¹ **disparities in participation among youth and voters of color persisted, and in some cases grew, compared to our older, non-Hispanic white population.**² The goals of California's election reforms, to achieve a more representative democracy, cannot be realized unless there is widespread public awareness of new opportunities to participate in democracy.

Our most recent innovation, to mail a ballot to every active, registered voter,³ is a case in point. The new law is important to expand voter access, but if it is not accompanied by a robust voter education and outreach program then it will not solve the continuing age and racial participation gap and will carry the risk of unintentional disenfranchisement for communities of color, youth, language minorities, people with disabilities, people with low incomes, and those who are unhoused, housing insecure or geographically mobile.

Our nonpartisan voting rights coalition urges the Governor and lawmakers to commit to earmarking at least \$85 million annually for three successive budget years to educate Californians for the 2022 and 2024 election cycles. Funding is necessary to inform people about the full range of their voting options, maximize turnout, ensure that all eligible ballots will be counted, combat the suppressive impact of election mis- and disinformation, and ultimately, to build a more representative electorate.

California's Participation Gaps

For the November 2020 election, voter registration rates of eligible Asian American, Black, and Latino Californians were between 10 to 18 percentage points lower than the comparable rate for eligible non-Hispanic white Californians. The voter turnout rates of people in these underrepresented groups were between 11 to 20 percentage points lower than the comparable rate for non-Hispanic white Californians.⁴ These trends have persisted over several presidential elections in California, and within the United States as a whole.

Disparities in turnout rates between younger and older Californians endure as well. The November 2020 turnout rate among California's eligible 18- to 24-year-olds was 20 percentage points lower than the population overall.⁵

While the turnout gap for youth, Latino, and Asian American voters is somewhat improved in Voter's Choice Act (VCA) counties compared to non-VCA counties, VCA counties still show a large turnout gap between those demographic groups and the general voting public.⁶

Addressing the Challenges of Vote-by-Mail Expansion

Without a robust voter outreach campaign, voters who are less comfortable or familiar with vote-by-mail may skip voting altogether, may not be aware of their preferred voting options, or make errors that could invalidate their ballots. It is particularly crucial that information be communicated in ways that are designed to reach low frequency voters. In the November 2020 election over 80,000 (0.5 percent) vote-by-mail ballots were rejected primarily because of a mismatched or missing signature or for being late. These numbers were higher for Latinos, young voters, first-time voters, and previous polling place voters.⁷

Language Access

Voters who need language assistance will not get translated materials at home unless they have registered a language preference or proactively contact their elections official. Education and outreach is essential for California's more than 2.6 million⁸ limited-English-proficient Asian and Latino eligible voters to learn how to access translated materials at home or to find in-person assistance.

Voter Preferences and Information Gaps

About a third of Californians said their preferred way to cast their ballot in 2020 was in person, with greater percentages of youth, Black, and voters with a disability preferring to vote in person.⁹ Given this preference, it is troubling that over a quarter of eligible voters in the primary election of that same year stated that they do not know or are unsure about where to find information about in-person voting locations. The largest percentages who did not know or were unsure about where to find voting information were youth (45 percent), Asian American (31.4 percent), Latino (34.2 percent) and Black Californians (24 percent), compared to a much lower percentage for non-Hispanic whites (19.6 percent).¹⁰ The need for voter education is made further apparent by the fact that over two-thirds of voters in counties with significant voting changes in 2020 were unaware of those changes.¹¹

Research from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) also highlights the need for voter education to address information gaps in underrepresented communities. A recent PPIC report¹² suggested that election officials should work to target underrepresented groups in primary elections, as part of implementing reforms, to avoid unintentionally expanding turnout gaps in low-turnout contests. The report also found that consolidating voting locations expanded turnout gaps for African Americans and Latinos and suggested "that election officials should make efforts to help mitigate or even counter negative effects from consolidation." We believe that voter outreach can help mitigate those negative effects.

Election Mis and Dis-Information

Election mis- and dis-information, which erodes voter trust and confidence in elections, has become widespread and is a pervasive problem in California and nationwide. It can only be countered by providing the funding needed to increase the volume of reliable election information available to voters. Official county government election materials, and trusted community messengers, are effective sources of election information, as noted in previously cited [research](#) from the Center for Inclusive Democracy.

Other Hard to Reach Communities

Certain communities are especially susceptible to the fear caused by mis and dis-information related to elections and eligibility to participate. California recently restored voting rights to people who are on parole, but it takes trusted, community-based messengers many cycles to re-register and encourage participation among people who were formerly incarcerated. This is likewise true for immigrant communities who need targeted in-language messaging so that they are aware of their voting rights.

Precedents for State Education and Outreach Funding

There are many precedents for state-funded outreach campaigns to raise public awareness among California's hard-to-reach communities. For example, the state appropriated \$187.2 million for [Census outreach activities](#) targeting hard-to-count households, [grants are awarded](#) to Community Based Organizations for education and outreach activities to raise awareness of the Golden State Stimulus (GSS) and the California Earned Income Tax Credit (CalEITC), the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) administers [public awareness campaigns](#) on testing and vaccination, and the Department of Social Services (DSS) conducts [multilingual public outreach activities](#) to increase participation in human services programs like CalFresh.¹³

The public dollars spent on Census outreach was a successful model, with California exceeding the highest average self-response rate for hard-to-count tracts among the ten states with the largest populations. With the state's 2020 Census outreach focused on hard-to-count households, including many of the same groups as underrepresented voters, we saw over one-third of hard-to-count tracts in California meet or exceed the 2010 self-response rate. The opportunity to invest in voter education and outreach funding with a similar focus on reaching underrepresented voters, and a commitment to collaborating with trusted messengers like CBOs, will help increase voter registration and participation in California and tackle historic age and racial disparities in the voting population.¹⁴

Voter Education and Outreach Budget Proposal

We support Assemblymembers Aguilar-Curry and Fong's [Legislative Budget ask](#) that would provide \$85 million this year for voter education and outreach and commit to additional funding for the following two budget years, to ensure that all eligible

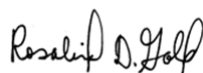
California voters have full and equal access to the ballot for the 2022 and 2024 elections. The budget request includes amounts to the Secretary of State for a statewide voter outreach campaign (\$35 million was the amount spent for a similar campaign in November 2020), as well as an additional \$2/voter to the 58 county elections offices to fund outreach through approaches such as mailings, social media, subgrants to community-based organizations and ethnic/local media who are trusted messengers for key communities, and mailing of returnable postcards to help voters with disabilities or with limited English proficiency access services.

This funding is necessary to avoid widening California's already significant age and racial participation gaps, to ensure that all eligible Californians, regardless of their background or experience, are fully and reliably informed about their voting options and opportunities, and to build an electorate that is truly representative of all Californians.

Sincerely,



Dora Rose
Deputy Director
League of Women Voters of California



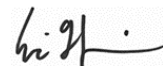
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cc: Secretary of State Shirley N. Weber, Ph.D.
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Endnotes

¹ Press Release, Secretary of State Alex Padilla Certifies Record Setting General Election Results (bit.ly/SoSDec2020PressRelease).

² U.S. Census Bureau (2020). Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2020, Table 4b. Retrieved at census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-585.html. See also: Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, The Experience of Black Voters In California: 2020 General Election and Beyond, December 2021 (bit.ly/BlackVoterExperience); Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, Voter Registration in California: 2020 General Election, December 2021 (bit.ly/CIDReportVoterReg2020); Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, November 2020 General Election: Latino and Asian-American Vote

(bit.ly/USCPriceReportNov2020); Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, California's Youth Vote: November 2020 Election (bit.ly/USCPriceYouthNov2020).

³ AB 37 (Berman 2021).

⁴ U.S. Census and Center for Inclusive Democracy reports, *supra*, note 2.

⁵ Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, California's Youth Vote: November 2020 Election (bit.ly/USCPriceYouthNov2020).

⁶ Preliminary data shows that the eligible turnout rate for California's population overall is 67.7 percent (68.6 percent in VCA counties and 66.9 percent in non-VCA counties). Asian American turnout in VCA counties is 47.2 percent and 45.9 percent in non-VCA counties; Latino turnout in VCA counties is 54.5 percent and 51.9 percent in non-VCA counties, and youth turnout is 51 percent in VCA counties and 45.5 percent in non-VCA counties. Final data will be released soon in a Center for Inclusive Democracy report.

⁷ Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Price School of Public Policy, California's Changing Electorate: A 2020 Post Election Analysis of Voting Behavior (August 2021) (bit.ly/CACHangingElectorate); Alexander, Kim and Romero, Mindy S., California Voter Foundation, Improving California's Vote-by-Mail Process by Reducing Ballot Rejection: A Three-County Study (September 2020) (calvoter.org/rejectedballots).

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau (2021). Section 203 Public Use File Dataset. Retrieved from census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/voting-rights/voting-rights-determination-file.html.

⁹ Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Price School of Public Policy, California's Changing Electorate: A 2020 Post Election Analysis of Voting Behavior (August 2021) (bit.ly/CACHangingElectorate).

¹⁰ Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, Voter Messaging in the Time of COVID-19, Study Report (bit.ly/CIDVoterMessaging2020).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, EN 9.

¹² McGhee, Eric, Paluch, Jennifer, and Romero, Mindy. Equity in Voter Turnout after Pandemic Election Policy Changes. (bit.ly/EquityInVoterTurnout, PPIC, March 2022).

¹³ Legislative Analyst's Office, Budget and Policy Post, March 8, 2018, The 2018-19 Budget Census Outreach, lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/3780; California Health and Human Services Agency, Department of Community Services And Development, Notice of Funding Availability 2021 California Earned Income Tax Credit Plus Education and Outreach Grant, csd.ca.gov/Shared%20Documents/2021-CalEITC-Plus-NOFA-ADA.pdf; California Coronavirus Covid-19 Response Toolkit toolkit.covid19.ca.gov/partners/; CalFresh Outreach cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/calfresh-outreach

¹⁴ California Census 2020 Outreach and Communication Campaign Final Report. census.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/04/California-Census-2020-Outreach-and-Communication-Campaign-Final-Report.pdf