DEBRA BOWEN | SECRETARY OF STATE | STATE OF CALIFORNIA
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July 17, 2008

NVRA Voter Registration Agency

Dear (agency or dept. head):

As you know, the (agency or dept. name) is designated under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) as a voter registration agency. Under the NVRA, your agency is required to provide people the opportunity to register to vote when they come into any of your agency's offices to apply for benefits or services.

Since taking office as Secretary of State in January 2007, I have been working to build partnerships with as many public and private entities as I can to improve our voter registration outreach efforts here in California. The NVRA provides us with a terrific gateway to thousands of potential voters who we may not be able to reach any other way, and I'd like to work with you to expand and improve your NVRA program to further that goal.

Here is an overview of some changes you will be seeing that I hope will assist your continued efforts to implement the NVRA in a fashion that will work for you and for Californians who come in contact with your local offices every day.

First, I have redesigned the **California Voter Registration Card (VRC)**. The new form uses a simpler layout, eliminates most of the information not required by law, and, most importantly, uses easy-to-read language. The new VRC will be available for distribution later this month. Enclosed is a copy of the redesigned VRC, which will remain the same size as the current VRC.

Second, I have created an **Agency Voter Registration Reporting Form** for your local offices to use to report voter registrations and declinations to their respective county elections offices. Currently, county elections officials submit monthly and biennial reports to the Secretary of State that include the number of voter registrations they receive from NVRA-designated agency offices located within the county. While in the past the level of detail in these reports has varied from county to county, my goal is to find ways to help counties provide complete reports on how many new voter registrations, as well as declinations, are collected by each NVRA-designated agency within each county. The enclosed one-page form is for NVRA-designated agency staff to report to their county elections office the total number of completed voter registration cards sent to the county and the total number of declinations received each calendar month. Please feel free to use this form or create one of your own that contains the same information.

Third, I am in the process of setting up an **NVRA webpage** on my homepage. The new webpage will have helpful information about NVRA requirements, contact information for county officials, and links to NVRA forms and publications, which can be viewed and downloaded.

As you may be aware, Project Vote published a February 2008 report on NVRA compliance. The report identified California as one of several states with a severe decline in voter registrations from public assistance agencies since 1995-96, when the NVRA was first implemented. While the report acknowledges that California's numbers are low due to incomplete reporting, the report attributes the decline largely to inadequate implementation of the NVRA by public assistance agencies. I believe if we can improve reporting, we'll likely see a jump in the number of reported registrations statewide and we'll be able to identify areas where we can improve voter registration services provided under the NVRA. For example, in California we have never kept track of how many people receiving services decline to register to vote at a public assistance agency. If we begin tracking both registrations and declinations from public assistance agencies, we'll be able to verify whether agencies are routinely offering people the opportunity to register to vote. Overall, Project Vote's report gives us an opportunity to improve the NVRA reporting efforts throughout California, so we can identify areas where we have strong compliance and areas where we need improvement.

I hope this information is helpful to you, and I certainly appreciate your agency's efforts to comply with the NVRA. I certainly welcome your thoughts or suggestions on NVRA compliance and on additional ways that we can work together to improve voter registration opportunities for Californians receiving public assistance. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me, or you may contact my Assistant Chief Deputy, Jennie Bretschneider, at (916) 651-8297.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Debra Bowen
Secretary of State

Enclosures

cc: California Association of Clerks & Election Officials (CACEO)