



DEBRA BOWEN

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2011 Ushers in Boosts to Transparency In Election Security and Campaign Finance

SACRAMENTO – Two new laws sponsored by California Secretary of State Debra Bowen to make details of voting equipment flaws and more campaign disclosure filings available online will take effect January 1.

Senate Bill 1404 requires voting system vendors and ballot manufacturers to notify the California Secretary of State, in writing, of every known problem in their respective systems used in California. Under the new law, the Secretary of State will submit a report of all disclosed defects to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). The EAC's website will serve as a clearinghouse for the reports, making it easy for anyone to access the newly disclosed information.

“Voters put their trust in voting systems to count their ballots exactly as they were cast,” said Secretary Bowen, the state's chief elections officer. “This new law requires voting system vendors to disclose defects before an incident may occur that could compromise election results. Because the voting systems used in California are also used nationally, voters throughout the country will benefit from California's transparency.”

The California Secretary of State is responsible for inspecting voting systems and ballot manufacturing facilities for potential problems or flaws before approving their use in elections. However, such companies were never required to notify the Secretary of any flaws in a product discovered before or after the Secretary's inspection. Companies may be liable for civil penalties of up to \$50,000 per violation for failing to disclose known product flaws.

“Manufacturers of cars, toys and thousands of other products must report defects when their product fails to meet certain standards,” added Bowen. “That same philosophy of transparency should apply to voting equipment which millions of Californians rely upon to accurately record and tally their votes.”

Assembly Bill 1181 lowers the threshold that triggers electronic reporting requirements for state candidates, committees, slate mailing organizations and lobbying entities. Currently, political entities must file their disclosure reports online with the Secretary of State's office if they have cumulatively raised or spent \$50,000. Beginning January 1, that threshold will be cut in half to \$25,000.

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“This new law will provide greater transparency by putting more campaign finance information at Californians’ fingertips,” added Bowen. “It is infinitely easier to research campaign and lobbying information that is online instead of having to come to Sacramento to dig through paper files. Political spending information should be as accessible as possible.”

The Secretary of State’s office is the central filing office for campaign and lobbying disclosure forms required under the California Political Reform Act. The CAL-ACCESS database at <http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov> provides online access to electronic filings. The Fair Political Practices Commission, a separate government agency, is charged with enforcing the Act.

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