



NEWS RELEASE

CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE **KEVIN SHELLEY**

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Counties, Secretary of State to Promote Permanent Absentee Program

Increasing number of voters prefer voting by mail

SAN FRANCISCO, CA -- Secretary of State Kevin Shelley today announced an agreement with local elections officials in 26 California counties to jointly promote the state's Permanent Absentee Voter (PAV) program. Under the agreement, the Office of the Secretary of State will mail more than 1.2 million applications to registered voters this week.

"Our objective is to make voting as convenient as possible for people who are balancing family, work and personal obligations," said Secretary of State Shelley. "This is a permanent Vote-by-Mail program that allows registered voters to review, cast and send in their ballot according to their own schedule."

Most California counties promote vote by mail programs because it increases the likelihood that people will cast their vote on Election Day. The permanent absentee ballot program also allows counties to process ballots and verify signatures in the days and weeks before the election, instead of receiving all or most of the ballots on Election Day.

"We always encourage voters to become permanent absentee voters because it's easier for them and it's easier for the county on Election Day," said Gene Browning, Assistant Registrar of Voters for Ventura County. "In Ventura, we see this as the wave of the future. The state supports this trend and we appreciate their efforts to provide resources."

Beginning in 2002, a new California law took effect, authored by then-Assemblyman Kevin Shelley, allowing all registered voters in California to become permanent absentee voters. In November 2000, there were 279,207 Permanent Absentee Voters in California, but that number increased to 1.24 million in November 2002 to over 2.12 million in March 2004. In the March 2004 Presidential Primary Election, 34 percent of the 6.7 million total votes cast were Vote-by-Mail ballots.

"We are working with the Secretary of State to encourage those folks who traditionally request absentee ballots to become permanent absentee voters," said Steve Weir, Contra Costa County Clerk.

Registered voters who do not receive the Permanent Absentee Voter mailing should contact their local elections office to request an application or go to myvotecounts.org to locate the county registrar of voters. The mailing will arrive in 26 counties this week.

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"In a time of funding constraints for local government, the state's mail program offers frequent voters an opportunity to become permanent absentee voters," said Steve Rodermund, Registrar of Voters for Orange County. "This provides a convenient option to voters who find it difficult to vote at a polling location on Election Day."

"We are pleased to work cooperatively with the Office of the Secretary of State to encourage voter turn out on November 2," said Al Fawcett, spokesperson for the Sacramento County elections department. "We encourage voters who wish to vote by absentee ballot to become Permanent Absentee Voters for this and future elections."

Prior to 2002, participation in the program had been limited to disabled voters. Registered voters who are signed up for the program receive their ballot several weeks before each election. Voters may return the ballot to any polling place in their county on Election Day, return it to the county registrar in person or send the ballot by mail so long as it arrives on or before Election Day.

Voters in the following counties will be receiving the initial mailing for the Permanent Absentee Voter registration program:

Amador	Inyo	Merced	Sacramento	Stanislaus	Yuba
Calaveras	Kings	Nevada	Santa Barbara	Tehama	
Contra Costa	Mariposa	Orange	San Benito	Tuolumne	
El Dorado	Madera	Plumas	Sutter	Trinity	
Imperial	Mendocino	Riverside	Santa Clara	Ventura	