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AB 868 – Strengthening Voter Representation in County Elections

PURPOSE

Assembly Bill 868 seeks to enhance California's election process by ensuring that county non-partisan elections appear on the general election ballot. This change would provide more voters with the opportunity to engage in key local elections.

BACKGROUND

Under current state law, a candidate for county office can win outright in a low-turnout primary if they receive over 50% of the vote, eliminating the general election for that seat. This means that many county officials are elected by a smaller and less representative primary electorate, rather than by the large, more diverse group of voters who participate in general elections.

According to the California Secretary of State, average turnout in statewide general elections between 2016 and 2022 was 55.39%, compared to just 32.09% in primary elections. In some county races, this can mean hundreds of thousands of voters are not involved in deciding key local offices.

A PPIC report found that primary electorates have historically included fewer young people, Latinos, and Asian Americans compared to the general electorate in the fall, with the largest gap among Latino voters. Economic factors, including income levels and homeownership status, also influence voter participation, resulting in primary voters being less reflective of the overall electorate.

EXISTING LAW

Current law allows candidates in county elections to win outright in the primary if they receive more than 50% of the vote. In 2017, AB 901 (Gloria) allowed San Diego County to require all county offices to appear on the general election ballot, regardless of primary results.

SOLUTION

This bill requires that county non-partisan elections appear on the general election ballot, ensuring that elections are decided by the broader and more representative general electorate. In the case that only two candidates file for a county office, the primary election is skipped, streamlining the process and eliminating unnecessary elections. AB 868 puts in place a process that is consistent with what is used for all state election races.

SUPPORT

California Common Cause (Co-Sponsor)
League of Women Voters of California (Co-Sponsor)
Initiate Justice (Co-Sponsor)
Initiate Justice Action (Co-Sponsor)
Inland Empire United (Co-Sponsor)

CONTACT

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