



## DEMYSTIFYING THE MYSTERIOUS: CALIFORNIA'S ELECTION LAWS Part 4: Online Registration—Convenience With a Price

We do everything online these days.

We all know there are risks associated with online activity, but it is SO convenient we accept the risks and hope we never get caught in a scam, in a data breach, in an identity theft.

Unfortunately, sooner or later we ALL pay for the convenience; sooner or later the risks catch up with us. And when they do, we bemoan the consequences and move on, taking the risks all over again.

But, there are some things that should NEVER be done online because they are so sacred that the risk will never be worth the potential consequences. One of the most sacred is any element of the electoral process.

In 2011, the California legislature sanctioned online voter registration. The law was not to be implemented until California could come into compliance with the federal mandate for a statewide voter database. The reasons were obvious: as long as voter databases were kept county by county, online registration affidavits could be filed by a single person in multiple counties and no one would catch the duplications.

But the state did the unthinkable. In defiance of the law, online registration was made available starting three weeks before the registration deadline for the 2012 General Election. 600,000 people registered online in those three weeks, with no time or ability for anyone to verify the eligibility of those registrants before they voted. The risk was a tainted election. **It was a risk not worth taking.**

And yet online registration has continued in California unabated, even though the mandatory statewide voter database (VoteCal) was not implemented until September of 2016, and to this day remains extremely unreliable, creating a clear and present danger to election integrity.

Online registration creates another challenge as well. The applicant cannot provide a signature online, so a comparison signature must be gathered from electronic sources, usually the signature provided at the DMV when getting or renewing a license.

This is problematic in several ways:

- Signing on an electronic pad at the DMV is awkward and is less likely to produce a recognizable signature.
- We are all “trained” to be careless with electronic pad signatures because we do it all the time at stores and banks and other places. We know that no one ever “verifies” those scribbles, and we have learned to regard it as a frivolous activity.
- People interacting with the DMV are there to get or renew a license—they are not thinking about the provided signature having a relevance in the election system. The DMV generally does not inform customers of that fact.
- As more and more people register or re-register online, these electronic signatures become the major and often only exemplar signature for a growing percentage of voters.
- As a result, the signature verification process has been made virtually impossible, and elections officials have often thrown up their hands and given in, accepting any signature provided for lack of a decent exemplar.

**At the very least, as long as there is an online registration option, the registration should be deemed incomplete until the applicant prints the**

**application and physically mails it in with a “wet” signature to use when signature verification becomes necessary (petitions, mail-in ballots).**

The online registration procedure in California is fraught with flaws that threaten election integrity.

You can help EIPCa push back on this and other bad laws.

- Open a dialogue with your state legislators. Chances are they have no idea these laws exist. At the very least, they are completely unaware of the negative consequences of what may have looked like a good idea on paper.
- Support EIPCa’s [federal lawsuit](#) with your fervent prayers and your consistent and generous donations.