

Senate Bill No. 415

CHAPTER 235

An act to add Chapter 1.7 (commencing with Section 14050) to Division 14 of the Elections Code, relating to elections.

[Approved by Governor September 1, 2015. Filed with
Secretary of State September 1, 2015.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 415, Hueso. Voter participation.

Existing law generally requires all state, county, municipal, district, and school district elections be held on an established election date. Existing law also establishes certain dates for statewide elections. Existing law requires any state, county, municipal, district, and school district election held on a statewide election date to be consolidated with a statewide election, except as provided.

This bill, commencing January 1, 2018, would prohibit a political subdivision, as defined, from holding an election other than on a statewide election date if holding an election on a nonconcurrent date has previously resulted in voter turnout for a regularly scheduled election in that political subdivision being at least 25% less than the average voter turnout within the political subdivision for the previous 4 statewide general elections, except as specified.

This bill would require a court to implement appropriate remedies upon a violation of this prohibition. The bill would authorize a voter who resides in a political subdivision where a violation is alleged to file an action in superior court to enforce this prohibition, and it would allow a prevailing plaintiff other than the state or political subdivision to collect a reasonable attorney's fee and litigation expenses, as provided.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Chapter 1.7 (commencing with Section 14050) is added to Division 14 of the Elections Code, to read:

CHAPTER 1.7. VOTER PARTICIPATION

14050. This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the California Voter Participation Rights Act.

14051. As used in this chapter:

(a) "Political subdivision" means a geographic area of representation created for the provision of government services, including, but not limited

to, a city, a school district, a community college district, or other district organized pursuant to state law.

(b) “Significant decrease in voter turnout” means the voter turnout for a regularly scheduled election in a political subdivision is at least 25 percent less than the average voter turnout within that political subdivision for the previous four statewide general elections.

(c) “Voter turnout” means the percentage of voters who are eligible to cast ballots within a given political subdivision who voted.

14052. (a) Except as provided in subdivision (b), a political subdivision shall not hold an election other than on a statewide election date if holding an election on a nonconcurrent date has previously resulted in a significant decrease in voter turnout.

(b) A political subdivision may hold an election other than on a statewide election date if, by January 1, 2018, the political subdivision has adopted a plan to consolidate a future election with a statewide election not later than the November 8, 2022, statewide general election.

14053. Upon a finding of a violation of subdivision (a) of Section 14052, the court shall implement appropriate remedies, including the imposition of concurrent election dates for future elections and the upgrade of voting equipment or systems to do so. In imposing remedies pursuant to this section, a court may also require a county board of supervisors to approve consolidation pursuant to Section 10402.5.

14054. In an action to enforce subdivision (a) of Section 14052, the court shall allow the prevailing plaintiff other than the state or political subdivision of the state, a reasonable attorney’s fee consistent with the standards established in *Serrano v. Priest* (1977) 20 Cal.3d 25, 48-49, and litigation expenses including, but not limited to, expert witness fees and expenses as part of the costs. A prevailing defendant shall not recover any costs, unless the court finds the action to be frivolous, unreasonable, or without foundation.

14055. A voter who resides in a political subdivision where a violation of subdivision (a) of Section 14052 is alleged may file an action pursuant to that section in the superior court of the county in which the political subdivision is located.

14056. This chapter does not apply to special elections.

14057. This chapter shall become operative on January 1, 2018.