**Voting in California Made Easier than Ever**

**Part II of a two-part series on voting by County Clerk Gail Pellerin**

As we enter the 2018 election cycle, unfounded allegations of voter fraud and voter suppression efforts remain in many states. In California, however, there are new laws and programs to improve the voter experience and make it easier to register and vote.

California’s new Motor Voter Act will be implemented this year. Beginning in April, every U.S. citizen who is eligible to vote when they apply for or renew a driver’s license or state identification at the Department of Motor Vehicles will be registered to vote if they meet all eligibility requirements, unless they opt out of voter registration.

Registering to vote has never been easier. You can register to vote online and you can pre-register to vote when you are 16. The deadline to register to vote is 15 days before an election if you want to vote by mail, or if you want to ensure your name will be on the list of voters at the polls. However, if you miss the deadline to register to vote, you can still register and vote up to and including Election Day at the following locations: the Santa Cruz County Elections, the Watsonville City Clerk’s Office, and the UCSC Bay Tree Conference Center. Voters who visit one of these locations will be able to complete their vote in three simple steps: 1. register to vote; 2. vote; and 3. seal their ballot in a special envelope and sign it. This is called Conditional Voter Registration (CVR), sometimes called Same Day Registration.

Vote by Mail has been made more voter-friendly. More than half of Santa Cruz County voters choose to vote by mail instead of going to the polling places. To make that a seamless experience, the return postage on the vote-by-mail ballots is now pre-paid, following a vote by the Board of Supervisors. As an alternative to mailing in your ballot, we will have seven ballot drop boxes located throughout the county through 8 p.m. on Election Day for easy and quick return of vote-by-mail ballots. Locations of the drop boxes are found online at [www.votescount.com](http://www.votescount.com/) and by calling 831-454-2060.

Voters are encouraged to use the ballot drop boxes, since mail can take anywhere from three to seven days. However, if you mail your ballot, be aware that ballots postmarked on or before Election Day and received by the Friday after the election will be added to the count. Another new law allows any voter in the State of California to return their ballot to any polling place, drop box, or elections office in the state. Whether you choose to return your ballot by mail, deliver it to an elections office or polling place, or place it in a secure drop box, it is best to do so early.

These three new programs -- automated registration at the DMV, conditional voter registration, and improvements to the vote-by-mail process – will add more people to our vote rolls and expand opportunities to vote. That not only makes voting easier and increases voter participation, it strengthens our democracy.