

# California Jail Voting Toolkit

## *November 2020 Cover Letter*

The information in this toolkit was initially created before the onset of the COVID-19 public health crisis, and it is clear that parts of the toolkit may not apply in a world that has changed so dramatically. While it is important to recognize those changes, it is equally important to recognize that there is continuity in the world before and after the emergence of COVID-19. In many ways the disease has pulled back the curtain to reveal injustices that existed before the spread of the virus, including housing insecurity, lack of healthcare access, and the ease with which job loss can push working people into financial despair.

The same is true for jails. This crisis has amplified the risk of disease and death while incarcerated. But those risks were present before COVID-19, as was the disproportionate use of incarceration on Black and Brown people and the regular denial of voting rights to people in jail. We therefore believe that it is more important than ever to work to include people who are inside jails in the political process. We hope that you will make use of the information in this toolkit during this November's election and future elections and will help fight to make the most marginalized people in our society part of our political future.

### **What will the November 2020 election look like for California voters?**

The COVID-19 pandemic poses unique challenges for the upcoming November election - ranging from the impact of physical distancing and sanitation requirements in potentially crowded voting locations and the need to protect medically vulnerable individuals, to the difficulty of recruiting poll workers and conducting meaningful voter outreach during a time when government resources are stretched thin. To help address some of these challenges and to help ensure that voters do not have to choose between their health and their right to vote, state lawmakers have put into place certain temporary changes to how this November's election will be run in California. Please note that each county's election plan will vary somewhat, so it's important to check with your local elections office for details.

First, all registered California voters will be mailed a vote-by-mail ballot several weeks before November 3rd. This means that it is critical that voters review their registration status as soon as possible to make sure their voter registration is active, contains the correct mailing address, and correctly indicates any language preference the voter may have. See pages 18-19 of the toolkit for important information about home address and mailing address for people registering while in jail. In order to ensure adequate time for processing and mailing, we recommend that incarcerated voters submit their updated voter registration to elections officials no later than October 20, 2020. Voters may request a replacement vote-by-mail ballot may by contacting their local election office or, if released before Election Day, by visiting their local voting location or elections headquarters during open hours.

Second, even though most Californians will likely return their ballots through the mail this November, voters who are released from a California jail before Election Day will still have the option to return their mail ballot early by dropping it off. Options for drop off will differ by county - some will have one early voting location, others will have many, and some will also provide secure ballot drop boxes. Voters outside of jail may also vote in-person at a voting location in their county up to 8pm on November 3rd if they did not receive a mail ballot in time, prefer to vote in-person, or need language, disability, or registration assistance. Check the website of your county elections office for hours and locations of in-person voting options and ballot drop off boxes near you. You can also check online at [sos.ca.gov/elections/polling-place](https://sos.ca.gov/elections/polling-place).

## **How can I use this toolkit to help incarcerated people vote during the coronavirus pandemic?**

While this toolkit was written with a pre-COVID-19 lens, it still contains several relevant strategies to register and turnout voters who are in jail. Below are a few key strategies we have pulled out to guide your in-jail voter registration and turnout planning.

### *Voter registration:*

Get started by reaching out to the jail to see how their operations have changed due to COVID-19. They may have implemented physical distancing measures that limit or completely prohibit in-person interactions. Once you know about any new limitations, you can build a strategy that works best in your county.

Voter registration strategy #3, Registration through Mass Emails and Mailers, may be the best approach if you can't gain any direct access to the jail or the people incarcerated there. See page 10 in the toolkit. This method involves mailing incarcerated people voter registration cards and other voting information, and it does not require any in-person contact. However, this strategy is not without its challenges. You will still need to build a list of contacts who are eligible to register and provide clear instructions about how to successfully register. Working with inside organizers may help you build a contact list and better navigate the procedures of your local jail (see strategy #2 on page 9, Incarcerated Person Registration with Advocate Assistance).

Getting the support of your local elections office and/or sheriff may make it substantially easier to acquire and distribute resources such as registration cards and informational handouts (see strategies #4 and #5 on page 11). You can learn how ACLU SoCal did voter registration from a distance in the example on page 10 of the toolkit, and you can read more about voter registration in general on pages 7-12.

### *Voting from Jail:*

Similar to voter registration programs, the structure of your voter turnout program will depend on how much, if any, direct access you can get to your jail. With help from the local sheriff, elections officials, or inside organizers, you can send informational mailings (such as the Easy Voter Guide) to incarcerated voters at strategic times that highlight upcoming deadlines and help voters understand what's on their ballot. Even without support inside jails, you can still send resources through the mail. Be aware that delays in the mail system are especially common right now, so it's best to plan as far in advance as possible.

## Resources and Information:

### *COVID-19 Resources:*

- Board of State and Community Corrections:  
**[bscc.ca.gov/covid-19-information-and-updates](https://bscc.ca.gov/covid-19-information-and-updates)**
- Ella Baker Center for Human Rights:  
**[ellabakercenter.org/COVID19EBC](https://ellabakercenter.org/COVID19EBC)**
- Prison Policy Initiative:  
**[prisonpolicy.org/virus](https://prisonpolicy.org/virus)**
- Root & Rebound:  
**[rootandrebound.org/covid19](https://rootandrebound.org/covid19)**
- Secretary of State:  
**[sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/vote-mail/vbm-nov2020-general-election](https://sos.ca.gov/elections/voter-registration/vote-mail/vbm-nov2020-general-election)**

### *Voter Information Hotlines:*

- Board of State and Community Corrections:  
**[bscc.ca.gov/covid-19-information-and-updates](https://bscc.ca.gov/covid-19-information-and-updates)**
- Secretary of State:  
**[sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/voting-california/voter-hotlines/](https://sos.ca.gov/elections/voting-resources/voting-california/voter-hotlines/)**
- (800) 345-VOTE (8683) - more languages available at link above
- Election Protection Hotline:  
**[866ourvote.org/](https://866ourvote.org/)**
- (866) OUR-VOTE - more languages available at link above