California Common Cause
Recommendations for Online Voter Registration Implementation
August 6, 2013

California passed SB 397 in 2011. Beginning in October 2011, California Common Cause began convening a group of registrars, election organizations, Governor's staff and staff from the Secretary of State's (SOS) office to address several major issues, chief among them: 1) how people who had no electronic signature on file with the Department of Motor Vehicles would be handled, 2) how to secure funding approval from the federal government and spending approval through the state's Joint Legislative Budget Committee, 3) facilitating the EMS transition to allow the counties to take in the new digital data, and 4) coordinating public education and outreach.

Ultimately, the new OVR system was implemented on September 19, 2012, within approximately 1 month of the voter registration deadline for the November 2012 elections. Almost 1 million people used the new system, with most registering for the first time. Based on this experience, California Common Cause makes the following recommendations to facilitate implementation:

1) **Convene an implementation task force.** This may include state and local election staff, Department of Motor (DMV) vehicles staff, and relevant election organizations. This group should set out to at least communicate regularly about goals for certain phases to be completed, identify the problems that the group can work together on, look for opportunities to share resources, and set up problem-solving meetings to move forward on specific issues.

2) **The sooner that "tech can talk to tech," the better.** This was true when DMV and SOS staff talked about how to set up a system to resolve the verification issues. There may be some issues that the technology staff are able to more quickly resolve. (In this case, tech

staff concluded that real-time verification, as opposed to a batch system, was their preferred option to verification).

3) **Identify issues that arise that are unique to online voter registration, focus on resolving these.** For instance, with paper registrations, the forms must be received at the close of business on the voter registration deadline day. Typically, this is 5:00 or 6:00 pm. With online voter registrations, the question arises whether someone should be allowed to submit their registration forms as late as 11:59 pm of the same day. Whatever the resolution of this question, it is also necessary to consider how to digitally "time and date stamp" each registrant.

Additional questions to consider include: how to manage online registrants who cannot be validated or who do not have an electronic signature on file, how to develop protocols for election officials (local or state) to pursue or receive missing information, how to treat first time registrants with regard to Help America Vote Act requirements, how to provide a user-friendly experience for registrants that also accommodates disability or language needs.

4) **Develop an outreach and public education plan early that involves input and participation from a broad array of community groups.**