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July 6, 2021

Honorable Lena A. Gonzalez
Chair, Transportation
California State Senate
Capitol Building, Room 2068
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 796 (Berman) as amended June 30, 2021– SUPPORT

Dear Senator Gonzalez:

Disability Rights California (DRC), a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, **supports AB 796**. This bill will be heard in Senate Transportation Committee on July 13, 2021.

AB 796 bill builds on the success of California's New Motor Voter program by further streamlining the voter registration process at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and enhancing the consistency, uniformity, and accessibility of voter registration in California.

Recently, California has made significant improvements to voter registration accessibility. The federal National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) and the California New Motor Voter (NMV) laws modernized the voter registration process, allowing eligible people to conveniently register or update their voter registration when completing a driver's license and state identification card (DL/ID) transaction at the DMV. Since the Motor Voter program launched at the DMV in 2018, it has resulted in 12 million new or updated voter registrations. With almost 88 percent of eligible Californians being registered to vote before the November 2020 General

Election – the highest percentage in the past 80 years¹ - it's clear that this program has dramatically improved voter accessibility in California.

Despite these accomplishments, more than 3 million eligible adults in California remain unregistered², a disproportionate number of whom are youth, people with disabilities, Black, Latinx, Asian American, Native, Indigenous, and people of color, those with limited English proficiency, or have low income.³

Furthermore, with 15 existing Voter's Choice Act (VCA) counties in California and more counties considering the adoption of the VCA ahead of the 2022 elections, maintaining the accuracy of our voter rolls becomes increasingly important as more Californians can expect to receive their ballot by mail. Streamlined, efficient voter registration opportunities at the DMV will ensure that our voter rolls are regularly updated and accurate going into every election.

AB 796 will help create a more representative democracy and ensure that the DMV's voter registration process is efficient, fair, and secure by changing California law to:

- Codify federal NVRA requirements into state law, further streamlining voter registration through DMV transactions and requiring the DMV to transmit completed voter registration applications to the Secretary of State (SoS) in a timely manner.
- Clarify that the date the DMV's timeline for transmitting registration applications to the SoS starts is the day that a completed voter registration application arrives at the DMV, whether by mail, in person, electronically, or otherwise.
- Require a completed voter registration application be transmitted even in circumstances where the DL/ID portion of the form is incomplete or where DMV administrative fees have not been paid.

¹ California Secretary of State, Record 22 Million Californians Registered to Vote Heading into General Election, (Oct. 30, 2020), available at bit.ly/SoSPressRelease103020 "[Return to Main Document](#)"

² California Secretary of State, 15 Day Report of Registration (Oct. 19, 2020), available at bit.ly/SoSRegistrationOct2020. "[Return to Main Document](#)"

³ U.S. Census, Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2018 (Tables 4b, 4c, 6, and 7), available at bit.ly/CensusVRData; Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, November 2020 General Election: Latino and Asian-American Vote, available at bit.ly/USCPriceReportNov2020; Romero, Mindy S., Center for Inclusive Democracy, USC Sol Price School of Public Policy, California's Youth Vote: November 2020 Election, available at bit.ly/USCPriceYouthNov2020. "[Return to Main Document](#)"

- Ensure the DMV monitors the timeliness of its transmittals to the SoS, provides information regarding delays and irregularities in its ability to do so, and increases transparency to the public on these matters.
- Require the DMV and SoS to each designate an employee with specific duties to guarantee compliance with the NVRA and the NMV laws.
- Require training of relevant employees on NVRA and NMV requirements and processing.
- Establish that the SoS convenes a stakeholder task force to provide advice and perform other duties with respect to implementing the Motor Voter Program.

Continued voter participation gaps in California mean that critical issues of local and statewide importance are being made by a predominantly whiter, older, and wealthier electorate that does not represent what this state truly looks like. While registration rates are increasing overall, we still have 3 million eligible, unregistered Californians – a disproportionate number of whom are from underrepresented populations.

We support AB 796 as a critical, commonsense measure to codify best practices, build on the success of California's Motor Voter program, and remove impediments to equitable voter registration. Please contact me if you have any questions about our position or if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent dot at the end of the last stroke.

Eric Harris
Director of Public Policy
Disability Rights California

cc: Honorable Members, Senate Transportation Committee
Honorable Marc Berman, California State Assembly
Harry Ermoian, Office of Assembly Member Berman
Eliza Brooks, Office of Assembly Member Berman