October 1, 2020

To: California Association of Clerks and Election Officials

From: Matt Siverling, Legislative Advocate

Re: Legislative Update

The 2020 Legislative Session has now officially, and thankfully, concluded. Late last night, the Governor acted on the last remaining bills that had reached his Desk a month ago during the final nights of Session. Pursuant to the State Constitution, the Governor had 30 days after the last day of Session to sign or veto any bill in his possession. As with most Governor’s he dragged out the process until the final day, and nearly the final hour, before retiring his pen for the year.

In total, Governor Newsom acted on 428 bills in 2020, a drastically smaller number of proposed laws due to the COVID-19 lockdown shortening and limiting the Session. He vetoed 56 bills for a veto rate of 13%, slightly lower then 2019, a year in which he vetoed 16.5% of the bills that cleared the Legislature for his consideration.

Since it is an election year, the Legislature will return for a one-day “swearing in” Session on December 7, 2020. During this event, all of the winners of the November Elections will be sworn in as Assembly/Senate Members, and the Desk will be open for introduction of priority bills. Since 2020 is the second year of a two-year Session, the process will begin from scratch next year. The first bills will be AB 1 and SB 1.

Any majority vote bill that was signed into law this year will go into effect January 1, 2021.

**Sponsored Bills**

**Assembly Bill 3365 (Judiciary)**

Existing law provides for a “confidential marriage,” whereby 2 unmarried people, not minors, who have been living together as spouses, may be married. Existing law requires a confidential marriage license to be issued by the county clerk, as specified, and then returned to the county clerk after the marriage has been solemnized. Under existing law, if a confidential marriage license is lost, damaged, or destroyed after the performance of the marriage, but before it is returned to the county clerk, the person solemnizing the marriage is required to obtain a duplicate marriage license by filing an affidavit setting forth the facts with the county clerk of the county in which the license was issued. Existing law requires the duplicate license to be issued by the county clerk no later than one year after the issuance of the original marriage license and returned to the clerk by the person solemnizing the marriage within one year of the date shown on the original marriage license.

This bill would instead require the county clerk to issue a duplicate confidential marriage license within one year after the date of the marriage and would require the person solemnizing the marriage to return the license to the clerk within one year of the date of the marriage.

***This measure was moving, and cleared the Assembly on consent. It was required to be heard in Senate Judiciary Committee in July when the Summer Recess concluded. Unfortunately, the measure did not meet the urgency to act this year, and was set aside by the Senate Judiciary Committee for the year.***

**Other Bills of Interest**

**Assembly Bill 1912 (Boehner Horvath)**

Existing law requires a person who regularly conducts business in the state for profit under a fictitious name to file a fictitious business name statement with either the clerk of the county in which its principal place of business is located or the clerk of the County of Sacramento, as specified, not later than 40 days from the time the registrant commences to transact business. Existing law further requires that person to file, as applicable, a statement of abandonment and a statement of withdrawal from a partnership operating under a fictitious business name. Existing law requires a county clerk to maintain one or more indices that permit the determination of specified information, including whether any business using a specific fictitious business name has on file a fictitious business name statement setting forth that name and, if so, the file number of the statement.

This bill would require the Secretary of State to maintain a ***searchable*** index on its internet website that meets the requirements of existing law with respect to those indices maintained by county clerks and would require a county clerk to ***timely*** provide to the Secretary of State a copy of a statement filed with the county clerk as described above, thereby imposing a state-mandated local program.

We’ve discussed concerns with the Author, who is the sponsor. There is a fundamental misunderstanding about the purpose and process for filing and maintaining a fictitious business name. There was an assumption that the filing of an FBN was equivalent to “reserving” or “claiming” the business name, leading the Author to believe that it is important to have a statewide database to ensure filers know what’s available.

***This measure has been held for the year. Since it is a second of a two year session, she will need to re-introduce next year.***

**Assembly Bill 2424 (Calderon)**

This measure was a reintroduction of a reintroduction of a bill from last year (Assembly Bill 2368, and AB 199 Calderon). These measures ended up not moving forward.

Essentially, the proposal would have shifted California into allowing for a system of electronic notaries to perform services from remote locations and maintain online/digital notary journals.

The bill was strongly opposed by the Secretary of State, and had no guidelines on the storage or retention requirements, uniformity or format issues.

Late last month, the measure was gutted and amended into a bill that would require notary publics to disclose to their clients that they are not licensed to practice law. The remote notary piece has been removed. Regardless, the bill is not moving.

**Senate Bill 741 (Galgiani)**

Adds marriage certificates and birth certificates of a person’s child to existing law that permits a person to file a petition seeking a judgment recognizing the change of gender to female, male, or nonbinary.

According to the author, current law allows transgender Californians to petition courts to change their name and gender to conform to their gender identity. The law then allows such a person’s old birth certificate to be sealed and a new one issued as an original to both protect the person’s privacy and respect their identity. However, there is no such provision in the law as to the treatment of transgender people’s marriage certificates and the birth certificates of their children. This bill would simply align the process for updating transgender people’s marriage certificates and the birth certificates of their children with the process for updating their own birth certificate. This will help to protect the privacy of transgender people and prevent discrimination when a transgender person enrolls their child in school, applies for a loan, or seeks to make medical decisions on behalf of an incapacitated spouse.

We have met with the sponsor and Author’s staff, as well as key Committee consultants to communicate the complexity of the concerns with the proposal. The main issue is the attempt to shoehorn the process for marriage licenses into the existing process to seal and issue new birth and death certificates for those who have gone through a gender change and wish to change their name (and eliminate records with prior identity). Since the process for marriage records is tangled between the State and counties, and the actual documents are issued by each county (each through a different mechanism); the application of the existing process for birth and death to marriage is not congruent.

In the Assembly Appropriations Committee, the measure was unfortunately amended to reduce cost to the State by striking the language that would have reduced the State/local spilt of funding derived from copies of vital records. We’d anticipated that the language would be problematic for the State, and had determined that the measure may be held based on the cost. Alternatively, the Committee opted to weigh their desire for the “policy” at the expense of passing an unfunded State mandate.

We immediately contacted the Author and sponsors, who committed to working with us on a solution. The Author offered to extend the effective date of the bill out by a year, and draft a “letter to the Journal” expressing her understanding that the issue needs to be addressed next year with a bill that provides a funding mechanism for the work associated with the mandate. We also explored some alternative funding sources, but in the late hour the sponsors and Senator were not interested in legislating outside of the Sections we’d proposed earlier.

Late in the process, we discovered that the delayed implementation that has been agreed to in an effort to provide time for adjusting and identifying funding sources for he mandate has been inadvertently removed from the bill during amendments that had been taken in Appropriations. We alerted the Author and sponsors about the fatal issue, but they decided to leave the bill in enrollment and agreed to work with us on an urgency bill next year.

This was not a viable option, so CACEO and CRAC submitted lengthy “request for veto” letters to the Governor, as well as copies of the “Letter to the Journal” that references the delayed implementation date of the bill. If the Governor were to sign the bill, it would become effective January 1, 2021 and clerks/recorders would be required to immediately comply with any customer requesting the new documents.

I’m pleased to report that the Governor opted to veto the bill. In his veto message, he cited potential unintended consequences with the proposed process that could inadvertently expose the applicant. The veto message focused on the State Registrar and CDPH; and committed to assisting next year in drafting a tighter bill that would accomplish the goals of the bill, which he communicated he was in favor of.

We will have work to do next year to ensure that the tweaks to the bill, as introduced next year, include funding and clear direction for the counties.

**Senate Bill 927 (Jackson)**

We were contacted early (and often) by the Senator’s office regarding SB 927 (Jackson); which is a reintroduction of several efforts undertaken by her and her staff in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. Prior versions of this measure required the county clerk to provide pamphlets and literature to marriage registrants to ensure that they understood (or were aware of) the many nuances of the “contract” that is marriage, including division of assets, custody issues and cost of divorce. All past efforts, including two that reached the Governor’s Desk (Davis) were vetoed with a message that opined on the inappropriateness of placing the clerk in a position to kill the mood on such an important day.

After meeting with them and discussing the past issues, the current (and last) effort was introduced in a much less ambitious form. This bill would require the Judicial Council to prepare and annually update a brochure concerning marriage and domestic partnership rights and obligations, including property rights and spousal support obligations. On or before January 1, 2022, the bill would require the State Department of Public Health to post the brochure on its internet website and print the brochure with the department’s next scheduled reprinting.

Senator Jackson is currently in her final year of eligibility for State Legislative service, and this would have been her last run at a “pamphlet” for educating those who are about to get married.

***The measure was tabled in favor of higher priority issues for 2020.***

**Assembly Bill 609 (Levine) CEQA Electronic Filing**

CEQA requires a lead agency to prepare, or cause to be prepared, and certify the completion of an environmental impact report on a project that it proposes to carry out or approve that may have a significant effect on the environment or to adopt a negative declaration if it finds that the project will not have that effect. CEQA also requires a lead agency to prepare a mitigated negative declaration for a project that may have a significant effect on the environment if revisions in the project would avoid or mitigate that effect and there is no substantial evidence that the project, as revised, would have a significant effect on the environment. The act requires the lead agency to mail certain notices to persons who have filed a written request for notices.

***This bill would require the lead agency and the project applicant to post those notices on their internet website.***

CEQA requires a lead agency to submit to the State Clearinghouse in sufficient number of copies, in either hard-copy or electronic form, a draft environmental impact report, proposed negative declaration, or proposed mitigated negative declaration for projects in which a state agency is the lead agency, a responsible agency, or a trustee agency; a state agency otherwise has jurisdiction with respect to the project; or the project is of sufficient statewide, regional, or areawide environmental significance.

***This bill would instead require a lead agency to submit to the State Clearinghouse, in electronic form, the above-described environmental review documents for all projects and would require the lead agency and project applicant to post those documents on their internet website.***

CEQA requires a state agency, if it determines to carry out or approve a project that is subject to CEQA, to file a notice of determination with the Office of Planning and Research. CEQA authorizes a state agency, if it determines that a project is not subject to CEQA, to file a notice of exemption with the Office of Planning and Research.

***This bill would require the notice of determination or the notice of exemption to be filed electronically by the state agency.***

CEQA requires a local agency, if it determines to carry out or approve a project that is subject to CEQA, to file a notice of determination with the county clerk of a county in which the project will be located. CEQA authorizes a local agency, if it determines that a project is not subject to CEQA, to file a notice of exemption with the county clerk of a county in which the project will be located.

***This bill would require the notice of determination or notice of exemption to be filed electronically by the local agency if that option is offered by the county clerk.***

***AB 609 failed passage and is dead for the year.***