

California Legislature pushes appointment transparency again over Newsom's objections

By Eric He

01/11/2024 08:00 AM EST

In what one lawmaker described as a situation similar to “Lucy holding the football for Charlie Brown,” a bill that would require the California governor’s office to reveal diversity data regarding gubernatorial appointees is back on the table after Gov. [Gavin Newsom](#) vetoed it for a third time last year.

[SB 782](#) is the fourth attempt by Sen. [Monique Limón](#) (D-Santa Barbara) to pass the measure, which has been watered down from its original 2021 version in hopes that Newsom would sign a narrower provision. Still, the governor has sent the bill back three times, citing cost, redundancy and the reliability of self-reported data.

In response to [Newsom’s veto](#) of last year’s bill, [SB 702](#), Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE) — a sponsor of the legislation — released [a report](#) finding that of Newsom’s 480 appointees to boards, commissions, agencies and task forces last year, 52 percent of positions were filled by white people. Black and Latino appointees, the next two highest categories, made up 28 percent of the roles, combined.

A [2022 report](#) by the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute also found that Latinos made up just 18 percent of executive appointments, despite accounting for 39 percent of the state population.

The bill, which cleared the Legislature last year with no opposition, is likely to be vetoed again if it reaches Newsom’s desk this year. But for Limón, it’s important for lawmakers to keep trying to push for more transparency.

“Not every bill makes it through the first time,” Limón told POLITICO. “But we keep trying. We, as legislators, keep trying if we believe that there continues to be a problem or a challenge that needs a resolution or a solution. And so I think that that's the position we're in.”

WHAT’S IN THE BILL?

This Pro Bill Analysis is based on the [text of the bill](#) as reintroduced on Jan. 3.

The bill would add a new section to the [Government Code](#) requiring the governor’s office to post on its website a list of the members on each state board and commission, beginning in 2026 (Sec. 1).

Starting in 2027, the office would be also required to release aggregate demographic statistics on Jan. 1 of each year, encompassing all of the prior year’s appointments.

This information would include the following information about each appointee, which would be self-reported:

- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Disability status
- Region
- Party affiliation
- Veteran status

WHO ARE THE POWER PLAYERS?

Sen. **Monique Limón** (D-Santa Barbara) has introduced the measure four times since 2021, partnering with **Hispanas Organized for Political Equality** as the lead sponsor.

Maria Morales, statewide policy director for HOPE, said at the Jan. 9 Senate Governmental Organization hearing that the [organization's report](#) — which showed that the plurality of appointments last year went to white people — indicates a need for in-house demographic reporting.

“Gov. Newsom has said that California is one of the most diverse states in the world's most diverse democracy,” Morales said. “But how can we know if our government is representative of that diversity without a report to evaluate our progress?”

Morales added that the bill would “establish a legacy of transparency for future administrations, and would advance California's goals of having a government that is representative of the people of our state.”

There has not been any listed opposition to the measures.

But Gov. **Gavin Newsom** has blocked the effort three times, so far. In his [most recent veto message](#) on SB 702 last year, Newsom said that he continues to be “deeply committed to making appointments at every level of government that reflect California's diversity.”

But, he added, because the information the bill seeks is optional and self-reported by candidates, the report “would not necessarily accurately reflect the diversity of appointees.”

“I have vetoed a similar measure for this reason, and my concern remains,” he wrote.

WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR?

Limón's first attempt, [SB 702](#) in 2021, was more ambitious, in that it would have required the governor to convene a working group to make recommendations on ensuring diversity in the state's leadership on boards and commissions, along with the release of the data.

Newsom's [veto message](#) of that bill stated that his office “already makes an intentional, transparent effort to engage with the Legislature, community partners, nonprofits, and a variety of stakeholders to build a diverse and qualified pool of candidates for appointed positions, and will continue to strengthen and build these partnerships.”

In 2022, Limón's [SB 1387](#) removed the requirement to form a working group. However, Newsom [then cited cost](#) as his reason for vetoing the bill — even though the Assembly Appropriations Committee [that year projected](#) “minor and absorbable costs” from the measure.

Last year, Newsom sent back [SB 702](#), raising concerns over inaccuracy of the data.

The bill has gradually garnered more support in the Legislature, reaching near unanimous bipartisan support last year.

“We believe that there is legislative appetite that is evidenced by the increasing number of votes it has,” Limón said at the Jan. 9 committee hearing.

In California, the state's [judicial council is required](#) to release aggregate demographic data of state court judges each year. Elsewhere, Illinois [passed a law](#) that took effect in 2015 requiring [similar reporting data](#) to SB 782. At the county level, [Los Angeles](#) and [Santa Cruz](#) counties have also passed transparency measures.

Limón and supporters of SB 782 also point to the fact that Newsom [signed a bill last year](#) that requires venture capital firms to report investment diversity data — presenting a difference between reporting standards for the private and public sectors.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The bill passed the Senate Governmental Organization committee on Jan. 9 and heads next to the Senate Judiciary Committee on Jan. 11.

Limón said in an interview that her "level of confidence that this is a bill that is supported by the Legislature is high" — but added that her "level of confidence that the governor will veto it again ... is high." She also pointed to a [projected budget deficit](#) as another potential hindrance that Newsom could cite as a reason for vetoing.

One Republican lawmaker, Sen. [Brian Jones](#) (R-Santee) encouraged Limón during the Jan. 9 committee hearing to seek a veto override if Newsom sends the bill back again. Limón, in response, said that using the override — which the Legislature rarely does and would likely need the backing of Democratic caucus leaders — is "not a decision for me to make."

Limón stressed that she remains open to working with the governor's office on the bill.

"The world's not going to change, but I do think that the world in our state can be improved by having more diverse voices on these 480 boards and commissions," Limón said.

WHAT ARE SOME STORIES ON THE BILL?

[Read POLITICO news on SB 782.](#)