

## Darien's Ballot Guide, for the March 5, 2024, California Primary Elections

Welcome back to this progressive guide to the California ballot propositions. Here, I express (somewhat) short analyses and key info about each proposition's content, offer my own position on each prop., and list the positions of a number of other groups and organizations.

I also recommend for your consideration some of the helpful election and candidate information sites – but those have changed quite a bit since my last communication with you all! For *this* guide, that means I can't give you as much info as in the past about *endorsements*. But I still try! See more details on assorted helpful websites below.

There is only one proposition on the ballot in this primary election. That's not by chance: The Legislature cut a deal with the other props. that *could* have been on the ballot just now. (They'll be on in November.) Also, of course, a bill passed some years ago limits all *initiative* measures to the general election. Prop. 1 is a combination of two bills passed – with large majorities – by the California Legislature.

I'm giving you more information than usual on our *one* proposition, which is a difficult choice.

### Abbreviations Used for Organizational Endorsements Listed in the Proposition Info Below

CA Chamber of Commerce	CofC	CA Teachers Association	CTA
Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Assoc.	Jarv	CA Labor Federation	Lbr
Service Employees Int'l Union, CA	SEIU	Peace and Freedom Party	P&F
League of Women Voters of CA	Lge	CA Federation of Teachers	CFT

*For California's Republican Party, Democratic Party, and Green Party, I was unable to find endorsement info.*

**Proposition 1:** Authorizes \$6.38 billion in state general obligation bonds for construction and of mental health and substance use treatment facilities, as well as some housing. Also, without changing the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) tax *itself* in any way, Prop. 1 shifts an additional approximately 5% of the tMHSA ax revenue from the counties to the state. **No.**

**No** – Lge, Jarv, Disability Rights California, Mental Health America of California, P&F

**Yes** – CofC, CTA, CFT, Lbr, SEIU, National Alliance on Mental Illness California, California Medical Association, California Hospital Association, at least four major California newspapers

### **So why is Darien's Ballot Guide going against labor, the major newspapers, and more?**

Well, this is a complex measure. It taketh and it giveth.

The *giving* is that it would provide funds to build *greatly needed* treatment facilities *and* some low-income housing. Also – *very good* is that it would construct housing designed to offer *supportive services* for the focus populations. It's the combination of housing with services that can make a huge difference for many people!

But there's also a lot of *taking*. County mental health treatment, funded by the MHSA, would lose (going, instead, for state use) about \$140 *million* a year of the MHSA money. But that's not all the county MHSA money that won't be available for mental health treatment. Prop. 1 also requires counties to spend an additional share of MHSA funds to address local housing shortages. With counties already making local choices (including housing) for their MHSA funds, why should they be *required* to spend their *limited MHSA funds* on housing?

This prop. is using some MHSA funds because they are an easy target, coming from a tax *already in place*. We're all painfully aware of the growing number of unhoused people. However, it's

*the cost of housing* that's propelling that increase, much *more* than mental health or substance use issues (which can be a *consequence* of living on the streets).

The *bond* billions in the prop. would go for building treatment facilities and housing, which are certainly needed. But the housing is very limited, mostly serving unhoused veterans (and only about 20% of them). And what about the crucial supportive services? They are not funded by this prop., so apparently, they depend on the county MHSA revenues, which are being *reduced*.

*Of course*, bonds raise many issues: Is this a good long-term investment? Why are the statewide taxpayers footing a bond bill for the next 30 years? To respond to homelessness, what about implementing new taxes *on those driving up housing costs*? And how about federal tax funds, to help pay for housing for the veterans that our *federal policies* create? Maybe a bond for these purposes is as good as it gets, but I'd prefer to see a bond not so entangled with the MHSA funds.

This measure likely is trying to do some good, but the focus seems to be on *looking* like it's doing good! The concerns raised, that Prop. 1 would provide *involuntary treatment*, perhaps even in locked facilities, are worth considering.

For me, the details of this prop. are where we get into trouble. It passed the legislature easily this time; I hope they'll work more thoughtfully on the *next* version.

It's notable that opponents are mostly smaller mental health rights groups, and *many* supporters are larger entities, especially corporations. Also, let's remember that savvy advice: "Follow the money!" Gov. Newsom is a big supporter of this measure, and his Ballot Measure Committee is supported by ... well, all the usual suspects for California money: police, fossil fuel, real estate, AirBnB, Google, and PG&E. (My information source on this is Courage California's Progressive Voters' Guide, which I'm lightly paraphrasing and which is included in the info listings below.)

## Helpful Election and Candidate Information

We live in a rapidly changing information world. Sadly, the very excellent Voters Edge – <http://votersedge.org/ca> – is no longer functioning. At the same time, many other sources still exist.

In *this* guide, I seek both to speak to a spectrum of political views and to make my biases clear. If you happen to consider yourself "progressive", you might find quite useful –

- the *comprehensive* **California Ballot Guide from Courage California** – <https://couragecalifornia.org/>. (On their home page, scroll down to find – on the right – the press release (or click here) [Statewide 2024 Primary Election Voter Guide Released in California](#). Scroll down again to the link to their Progressive Voters' Guide, which includes **all 22 candidates for the U.S. Senate seat**.)

For impartial and basic info, try these:

- take a look at **Cal Matters** <https://calmatters.org/>, which offers background and helpful info on who endorses propositions.
- the ever-helpful (but now *very* general) **League of Women Voters** at <https://lwvc.org> (and you may be able to find their much more complete info for your area by looking for a website for your local League).
- <https://ballotpedia.org> provides background voting info and will show you your addresses sample ballot and give some background.
- <https://www.ballotready.org/> – a full range of voting information

*For the general election in November*, I also value the **Friends Committee on Legislation** of California, who have a good proposition analyses, at <http://fclca.org/>. (But nothing right now!) The same can be said of [www.californiachoices.org](http://www.californiachoices.org) and <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/elections/ballot-measures/2024/CA>: They often have good info – but not for this primary.

Also possibly useful – find out about the political donations: <https://www.sos.ca.gov/campaign-lobbying/cal-access-resources/measure-contributions>