

CHAPTER
24

Governing the State of California

SECTION 1

THE CALIFORNIA STATE CONSTITUTION

TEXT SUMMARY

Each state has a written constitution, which is that state's supreme law. Each state constitution enshrines two principles: **popular sovereignty**, which

means that the government's authority comes from the people, and **limited government**, which means that government only has specific powers.

California has had two constitutions—one passed in 1849, and the second passed in 1879. Since then, the California constitution has been amended more than 500 times. California's constitution sets forth a basic bill of rights, a

structure for California government, some other basic details of government, and the procedures for amending the constitution.

An amendment to the California constitution will pass if it is ratified by two-thirds of both houses of the legislature, and is then approved by the voters. Voters may also propose amendments by means of the **initiative** process.

The California constitution is probably in need of reform, because it is lengthy and outdated. In addition, it does not maintain enough distinction between **fundamental law**—rules of basic and lasting importance—and **statutory law**.

THE BIG IDEA

The California constitution is the supreme law of the State; it sets out how California is governed.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: California Constitution

State constitutions are much less flexible, and much more detailed, than the United States Constitution.

California constitution
is the State's supreme law.
provides for popular sovereignty and limited government.
outlines civil rights.
defines the structure of State and local governments.
divides power among the branches of State government.
sets out ways in which it may be revised or amended.
most likely needs to be reformed.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why is the California constitution in need of reform?
2. **Chart Skills** How can the California constitution be amended?