

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1509

*As Passed House
March 11, 1991*

Title: An act relating to ongoing absentee voter status.

Brief Description: Expanding eligibility for ongoing absentee voter status.

Sponsor(s): Representatives Anderson, McLean, Miller, Bowman, Haugen, Pruitt and Paris; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, February 20, 1991, DP;
Passed House, March 11, 1991, 96-0.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
STATE GOVERNMENT**

Majority Report: *Do pass.* Signed by 10 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Pruitt, Vice Chair; McLean, Ranking Minority Member; Bowman, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler; R. Fisher; Grant; Moyer; O'Brien; and Sheldon.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: The registered voters of this state may choose to vote by absentee ballot rather than by voting at the polls. State law does not restrict this choice to those with certain reasons for needing to vote in this manner; it is an option for all voters. A voter must, however, file a written request for the absentee ballot with the county auditor.

In 1985, the Legislature established a means by which certain voters may request to vote by absentee ballot on an "ongoing" basis, rather than having to request absentee ballots on an election-by-election basis. A disabled voter or a voter over the age of 65 may choose to be an "ongoing" absentee ballot voter. A voter's status as an "ongoing" absentee ballot voter is generally valid from the time of application until January 1st of the next odd-numbered year. Following that date, the auditor must send the voter an application to renew the "ongoing" status. This status is also terminated by: the written request of the voter; the

death or disqualification of the voter; the cancellation of the voter's registration record; or the return of an "ongoing" absentee ballot as being undeliverable.

Summary of Bill: Any registered voter may choose to vote by absentee ballot on an "ongoing" basis. A person's status as an "ongoing" absentee ballot voter no longer automatically terminates on January 1st of each odd-numbered year.

Fiscal Note: Requested February 5, 1991.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (1) Voter "turnout" by ongoing absentee voters is high. Absentee ballot voting is particularly attractive in rural communities where working hours are long or persons spend much time traveling. The bill will expand this category of voter. (2) Casting a ballot at the kitchen table with a voters' pamphlet and other information in hand is probably a more informed form of voting than voting at the polls. (3) The bill will assist auditors in estimating the total number of absentee ballots needed for an election and will permit more mailings at bulk rates.

Testimony Against: The two-year automatic expiration of person's status as an "ongoing" absentee voter should be maintained.

Witnesses: Bill Provost and Sam Reed, County Auditors Association (in favor); Calvin Castle (in favor if retain two-year expiration of "ongoing" status); and Eleanora Balliscotes.