

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1646

As Reported By House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to ongoing absentee voter status.

Brief Description: Expanding eligibility for ongoing absentee voter status.

Sponsors: Representatives Anderson, Reams, Veloria, Vance, Campbell, Dyer, Pruitt, Conway, Brough, King, Miller, Springer, Forner, Wineberry and J. Kohl.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, February 18, 1993, DP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Veloria, Vice Chair; Reams, Ranking Minority Member; Vance, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Conway; and Pruitt.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: The registered voters of this state may choose to vote by absentee ballot rather than at the polls. A voter must, however, request the absentee ballot from 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 1 of the next odd-numbered year. Following that date, the auditor must send the voter an application to renew the 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 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 1 of each odd-numbered year.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: (1) The "ongoing" absentee ballot program is well suited to the needs of persons who generally are working or on the road on election days. The bill permits any voter to sign up for this program. (2) The program is administratively efficient. Envelopes for sending absentees to ongoing absentee voters can be pre-printed, freeing the elections office from this task during the extremely busy period before an election. (3) Currently, a voter who signs up for the program before an election in an even-numbered year can be confused when he or she receives a renewal notice the very next January. Voters often ignore the notice, thinking it was sent by mistake.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: John Pearson, Office of the Secretary of State (in favor); and Karen Flynn, Washington State Association of County Auditors (in favor).