

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5819

As Reported By House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to voting by mail.

Brief Description: Authorizing voting by mail for any primary or election for a two-year period.

Sponsors: Senators Haugen, Vognild and Quigley.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, February 23, 1994, DP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Veloria, Vice Chair; Reams, Ranking Minority Member; L. Thomas, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Campbell; Conway; Dyer; King and Pruitt.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: The state's Election Code permits the county auditor to conduct any primary, special election or general election in a precinct with fewer than 200 registered voters by mail ballot.

The Code also identifies circumstances in which a nonpartisan primary or special election may be conducted entirely by mail ballot. Such vote-by-mail special elections are authorized if they are not held in conjunction with a state primary or general election. A vote-by-mail primary or special election in conjunction with the primary may be conducted in an odd-numbered year. However, such a primary may be conducted by mail ballot only if no partisan offices, state offices or state ballot measures would also be voted upon.

A person who wilfully violates any provision of the Election Code regarding the conduct of a vote-by-mail special election is guilty of a class C felony. The Election Code provides specific penalties for a number of unlawful activities conducted during any type of primary or election. All other violations of the vote-by-mail laws are misdemeanors.

Summary of Bill: For a two-year period beginning on the effective date of this bill, the county auditor may conduct in any precinct any primary or election, partisan or nonpartisan, entirely by mail ballot.

A person who wilfully violates any provision of the Election Code regarding the conduct of a vote-by-mail primary or election is guilty of a class C felony.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: (1) Vote-by-mail elections triple turnout, cut election costs, and allow voters to vote at home with the election information they have gathered. (2) Snohomish County cannot take advantage of a state law authorizing primaries to be conducted by mail ballot in odd-numbered years if they are for nonpartisan offices because its charter requires some of its partisan offices to be voted upon during odd-numbered years. (3) Vote-by-mail special elections in King County regularly result in a 65 percent turnout.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Bob Terwilliger, Snohomish County Auditor (in favor); and Sonia Soelter, King County Elections and Records Division (in favor).