SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 5662

As Passed Senate, March 12, 1999

Title: An act relating to a study of on-line voting.

Brief Description: Studying on-line voting.

Sponsors: Senators Finkbeiner, Brown and Winsley; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief History:
Committee Activity: State & Local Government: 2/15/99, 2/22/99 [DP].
Passed Senate, 3/12/99, 29-16.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass.
Signed by Senators Patterson, Chair; Gardner, Vice Chair; Haugen, Horn and Kline.

Staff: Karen Kirkpatrick (786-7403)

Background: All voting is currently done by direct paper ballot at a polling station or by absentee mail ballot.

It has been suggested that on-line or Internet voting could reduce costs to the state, increase convenience to the voter, and eliminate barriers to voter participation.

The Secretary of State's Office is requesting this legislation to explore the technological and procedural issues related to on-line or Internet voting.

Summary of Bill: The Secretary of State is directed to: (1) assemble a task force to conduct a study of issues related to incorporating on-line and Internet technologies in the voting process; (2) create an advisory committee of county election staff and technical and other experts to do research and assist the secretary; (3) determine the appropriate security measures and minimum standards required for certification of systems; (4) make recommendations concerning legislation and rules necessary to implement a system of on-line or Internet voting; (5) consider the impact of an on-line or Internet voting system on voter participation rates, public accessibility, potential external influences during the elections process, and other issues related to the conduct and administration of elections; and (6) report to the Legislature by March 1, 2000.

The study expires June 30, 2001.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 9, 1999.

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

Testimony For: Technology and the Internet are changing rapidly so there is a need to study the application of these methods to voting. People like to vote at home which explains the geometric increase in absentee ballots. Voter's pamphlets, election results, applications for absentee ballots are all available on-line now, an on-line voting study would be the appropriate next step. There are many challenging issues that need to be addressed such as security, secrecy, and fraud, so it is not time to begin on-line voting yet, but it is time to start investigating the issues and setting standards. There are several companies doing pilot projects and testing on-line voting currently. With its high-tech reputation, Washington should be a leader in on-line voting.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: David Elliott, Office of the Secretary of State; Sam Reed, Thurston County Auditor; Jim Adler, Soundcode Inc.; Dale Miller, eBallot Inc.