
State Government Committee

HB 1094

Brief Description: Extending mail balloting.

Sponsors: Representatives Hatfield and Morris.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows a county auditor to designate any precinct as a "mail ballot precinct".
- Allows a county auditor to conduct a particular primary or special election by mail.

Hearing Date: 2/13/03

Staff: Katie Blinn (786-7114).

Background:

Voters in Washington have the option of voting my mail in every election. This practice is known as "vote-by-mail" or "ongoing absentee". Voters can revert to voting at their assigned polling place by notifying the county auditor. Of those who voted in the 2000 general election, 54% voted by mail.

Aside from the option that voters have to vote by mail, counties may conduct an election entirely by mail under three circumstances:

- A county auditor may designate a precinct as a "mail ballot precinct" if it has less than 200 active voters, not including those who already vote by mail. This is a semi-permanent designation.
- A local jurisdiction requesting a special election for a nonpartisan office may request that the election be conducted by mail. This option is intended to reduce the costs of the special election, which the jurisdiction must bear. The county auditor decides whether the election will be conducted by mail. This is an election-by-election decision.
- A county auditor may conduct an odd-year primary by mail for a local office or ballot measure if the auditor first obtains the approval of all affected legislative bodies. The primary may not be conducted by mail if partisan office, state office, or state ballot measure is on the ballot. This is an election-by-election decision.

Summary of Bill:

The existing statutes are changed as follows:

- A county auditor may designate any precinct as a "mail ballot precinct", regardless of the number of active voters in the precinct. Under this statute, the auditor can designate every precinct in the county as a mail ballot precinct. This is a semi-permanent designation.
- The special election option is substantially unchanged: a jurisdiction having a special election for a nonpartisan office may request that the election be conducted by mail. This is an election-by-election decision that is made by the county auditor.
- A county auditor may conduct a primary or special election by mail. This allows auditors to maintain the election-by-election option if they do not want to permanently designate a jurisdiction as vote-by-mail. This option cannot be used for a general election.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.