
State Government Committee

SB 5587

Brief Description: Requiring voting devices to be accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Sponsors: Senators Fairley, Keiser, Kline, Winsley, Kohl-Welles and Rasmussen.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes certification standards for visually impaired voting technology and systems.

Hearing Date: 3/21/03

Staff: Anne Warwick (786-7291).

Background:

Under Title II of the "Help America Vote Act" the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services (SHHS) is authorized to administer grants to state and local governments to make polling places accessible to the disabled, including the blind and visually impaired. Grants may also be used to provide information about the accessibility of polling places. Payments are made no later than April 29, 2003. To receive funding under this section, a state or locality must submit an application to the SHHS describing activities for which assistance is sought, and additional information as necessary. States must submit a report to the Secretary of State (Secretary) not later than six months after the end of each fiscal year on the activities conducted with the fund.

Currently under Washington State law all sensory or physically handicapped voters are assisted at the poll site or at home or absentee ballot. At a poll site, if the voter declares in the presence of an election official that he or she is unable to vote independently, the voter may designate a person of his or her choice or two election officials from opposite political parties to help record their vote as directed.

Summary of Bill:

The Secretary establishes standards for the certification of voting systems and technology that are accessible to blind and visually impaired voters. All newly acquired voting technology and systems utilized by the state or any county must allow blind and visually impaired individuals with access equitable to those who are not blind or visually impaired. Each

polling location must have at least one certified voting unit accessible to those voters which are blind or visually impaired.

Implementation is contingent on available funds. Voting technology and systems purchased prior to the effective date must meet compliance at the time of an upgrade or replacement of existing voting equipment and systems.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available on HB 1222.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.