HOUSE BILL REPORT
SHB 1754

As Passed House:
March 15, 2005

Title: An act relating to mail ballot elections.

Brief Description: Authorizing county-wide mail ballot elections.

Sponsors: By House Committee on State Government Operations & Accountability (originally sponsored by Representatives Hunt, Nixon, McDermott, Haigh, Upthegrove, Moeller, Kenney, Chase, Simpson, Miloscia, Sells and Linville; by request of Secretary of State).

Brief History:
Committee Activity:
State Government Operations & Accountability: 2/22/05, 3/2/05 [DPS].
Floor Activity:
Passed House: 3/15/05, 58-38.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

•   Allows counties to conduct all elections by mail ballot prior to January 1, 2008.

•   Requires all elections to be conducted by mail ballot effective January 1, 2008.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ACCOUNTABILITY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Green, Vice Chair; Hunt, McDermott and Miloscia.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Nixon, Ranking Minority Member; Clements, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Schindler and Sump.

Staff: Jim Morishima (786-7191).

Background:

A county auditor may designate a precinct as a mail ballot precinct if it has fewer than 200 active registered voters, excluding ongoing absentee voters. If the auditor designates a precinct as a mail ballot precinct, he or she must notify all registered voters in the precinct by mail that all future elections will be conducted by mail. If the number of active registered voters in the precinct increases to over 200, or the auditor decides to return to a polling place

election environment, the auditor must notify voters by mail and provide the address of the polling place.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Prior to January 1, 2008, a county auditor may conduct all elections by mail ballot if he or she is given authorization to do so from the county legislative authority. The county legislative authority must give its authorization to conduct all elections by mail ballot to the auditor at least 90 days in advance of the first election to be conducted by mail. If the county legislative authority and the county auditor decide to return to a polling place environment, the county legislative authority must give its authorization to do so to the auditor at least 180 days in advance of the first election to be conducted in a polling place environment. The auditor must then notify all registered voters in the county and provide them with the polling place to be used.

Effective January 1, 2008, all elections in the state must be conducted by mail.

Prior to converting to a mail ballot election, the auditor must notify all registered voters in the county that all elections will be conducted by mail. Individuals with disabilities must be given voting access in all vote by mail elections.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This would give counties the option of mail elections. Some counties have so many people voting by mail that it is not worth the money to set up polling places. Some counties already have converted to all mail elections. Converting to all mail elections will result in a better informed electorate, greater convenience for voters, increased voter turnout, increased efficiency, reduced election fraud, less costly elections, and more consistency in voting. Mail elections will also do away with many of the problems with provisional ballots.

(Neutral) This bill should be clarified to ensure that mail elections may not be conducted by e-mail.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Hunt, prime sponsor; Sam Reed, Secretary of State; Bob Terwilliger, Auditor, Snohomish County; and Harry Abbott.

(Neutral) Linda Franz, Black Box Voting.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.