

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5565

As Passed Senate, March 7, 2005

Title: An act relating to information for out-of-state, overseas, and service voters.

Brief Description: Informing out-of-state, overseas, and service voters of rights and procedures.

Sponsors: Senators Schmidt, Kastama, Weinstein, Roach, Keiser, Sheldon, Shin, Rockefeller, Oke and Kohl-Welles.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/15/05 [DP].

Passed Senate: 3/7/05, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Kastama, Chair; Berkey, Vice Chair; Roach, Ranking Minority Member; Benton, Fairley, Haugen, Kline, McCaslin, Mulliken and Pridemore.

Staff: Cindy Fazio (786-7405)

Background: The Secretary of State provides county auditors with envelopes and instructions for out-of-state voters, overseas voters, and service voters.

Summary of Bill: The Secretary of State must include, at a minimum, the following information on the outer return envelope:

- return postage is free;
- the date written on the return envelope by the voter is considered the date of mailing;
- the envelope must be signed by election day;
- the signed declaration on the envelope is the equivalent of voter registration;
- faxed voted ballots are allowed if the voter agrees to waive secrecy;
- faxed documents must be accompanied by an original signed ballot by the day of election certification, which is fifteen days after the election; and
- e-mail is available under the federal Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, which is administered at the county level, and allows for a ballot to be e-mailed to a voter, which the voter may print out, and return by mail.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: Again, just recently, comments were heard about military people who received their ballots too late to cast a vote, or who had general questions about what their voting options were. Putting all this information together in one place will help get information out to those who are trying to vote. Snohomish county had a lower than usual military return during the recent election. The military return is usually higher than the county generally. We must take this easy step to help inform our military voters. While help is available in other forms, anything that can be done to educate the voter is a good idea. As another helpful example, it would help the auditors for a person registering to vote to indicate they are in the military.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Schmidt, prime sponsor; Pat McCarthy, Pierce Co. Auditor.

House Amendment(s): The required information can be provided on the ballot envelope or on an instruction sheet. The return postage is free if the envelope is mailed through the United States postal service, the United States armed forces postal service, or the postal service of a United States foreign embassy. The voter may obtain a ballot via electronic mail from the Secretary of State's website. The voter would then print the ballot, complete it, and mail it in a timely manner.

Passed House: 96-0.