

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2473

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Affairs

Title: An act relating to inactive voters.

Brief Description: Eliminating the requirement that auditors send a ballot or an application to receive a ballot to inactive voters.

Sponsors: Representatives Hunt, Armstrong, Appleton and Blake.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 1/15/08, 1/22/08 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Eliminates the requirement that a county auditor send inactive voters a ballot or ballot application at least 18 days prior to an election.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kretz, Lias, Miloscia and Ormsby.

Staff: Tracey Taylor (786-7196).

Background:

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 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.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

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. In addition, the auditor must send each inactive voter either a ballot or an application to receive a ballot at least 18 days before a primary, general, or special election. If an inactive voter returns a voted ballot or a completed application, the ballot shall be counted and the voter's status is restored to active.

A county auditor is required to assign a registered voter to inactive status and send a confirmation notice if certain documents are returned by the postal service as undeliverable: an acknowledgement of registration; an acknowledgement of transfer to new address; a vote-by-mail ballot, absentee ballot or application for a ballot; notification to a voter after a precinct reassignment; notification to serve on jury duty; or any other required document, other than a confirmation notice, mailed by the county auditor to the voter. In addition, the county auditor is required to assign a registered voter to inactive status and send a confirmation notice whenever a change of address information from the Department of Licensing, or other agency designated to provide voter registration services, indicates the voter has moved to an address out of state or the auditor receives a postal change of address information indicating the voter has moved out of state.

An inactive voter must be returned to active status, if during the period beginning on the date the voter was assigned to inactive status and ending on the day of the second general election for federal office that occurs after the date that the voter was sent a confirmation notice, the voter: notifies the auditor of a change of address within the county; responds to a confirmation notice with the information that the voter continues to reside at the registration address; votes or attempts to vote in a primary or general election and resides in the county; or signs any petition authorized by statute for which the signatures are required by law to be verified by the county auditor or Secretary of State. If the inactive voter fails to provide notice or take action within that period, the county auditor must cancel the person's voter registration.

According to the Secretary of State's Monthly Voter Registration Report as of December 31, 2007, there were 3,261,556 active registered voters in Washington and 460,982 inactive registered voters. These numbers continually fluctuate and are updated monthly.

Summary of Bill:

The county auditor is not required to send each inactive voter either a ballot or an application to receive a ballot at least 18 days prior to a primary, general or special election.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) When a voter is put on inactive status, the county auditor is required to send a confirmation notice to the address on file. If a registered voter returns the confirmation notice or votes in one of the next two federal elections, his or her status is returned to active. There are up to six ballot mailings per year and for each ballot mailing the county auditor is required to send ballots or ballot applications to addresses that are known to be invalid. This bill would eliminate the risk consequences of sending ballots to a bad address. Also, there are many opportunities for a voter to become active again. Every household receives a voter's pamphlet which also serves as an excellent reminder for a voter to reactivate or register to vote. The repeated and unnecessary mailings cost state and local governments and receive a minimal response – less than 1 percent! There are more effective ways to spend the money to ensure voter participation.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Jeanne Youngquist, Washington Association of County Auditors; Zona Leihart; and Shane Hamlin, Office of the Secretary of State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.