
State Government & Tribal Affairs
Committee

HB 1079

Brief Description: Modifying elections by mail provisions.

Sponsors: Representatives Hunt, Green, Darneille, Liias, Reykdal, McCoy, Appleton, Kagi and Jinkins; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires all counties to conduct all elections entirely by mail.
- Changes precinct sizes to not more than 2,000 active registered voters effective 2012.
- Requires county auditors to open a voting center in the county auditor's office.

Hearing Date: 1/12/11

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

As early as 1915 a voter was allowed to cast an absentee ballot if he or she was not able to be present to vote at the polls on election day. In 1933 voters with disabilities and voters over the age of 65 were authorized to vote an absentee ballot. In 1967 a county auditor could designate a mail ballot precinct if the precinct had less than 100 registered voters. By 1974 the Legislature expanded absentee voting to all voters who made a request, and by 1993 those voters could request to vote absentee on an on-going basis. In 2005 county auditors were allowed to conduct all elections entirely by mail ballot with the approval of the county legislative authority. Presently, all counties, except Pierce County, conduct elections entirely by mail.

Summary of Bill:

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.

All counties must conduct all elections entirely by mail ballot. Any county auditor that maintained poll site voting must notify each registered poll voter that all future primary, general, and special elections will be conducted by mail.

County auditors are required to open a voting center in the county auditor's office that shall be open during business hours during the voting period. The voting period begins 18 days before and ends at 8:00 p.m. on the day of an election. The voting center must provide voter registration materials, replacement ballots, provisional ballots, disability access voting devices, sample ballots, instructions on how to vote the ballot, a ballot drop box, and voters' pamphlets, if published.

The voting center must be accessible to persons with disabilities and must provide at least one voting unit that provides access to individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Persons wishing to vote at a voting center must either sign a ballot declaration or provide identification. A voter who has already returned a ballot but requests to vote at a voting center shall be issued a provisional ballot. The provisional ballot will not be counted if the canvassing board finds that the voter has a regular ballot has been returned and the voter has already been credited with voting.

Determinations of precinct size are changed from not more than 900 active registered poll voters to a maximum of 2,000 active registered voters.

References to polls, poll site voting, poll books, poll lists, precinct polling places, poll site ballot counting devices, absentee voting, precinct election officers, and inspectors and judges of election are removed.

Statutes relating to precinct and polling place determination and accessibility; absentee voting; polling place elections and poll workers; disability access voting; voting by mail; canvassing; casting a vote at a polling site; duties of election officers in securing unused ballots at polling sites; and crimes and penalties are repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect July 1, 2012, except for section 46 relating to absentee ballots which takes effect July 1, 2013, after expiration of the instant run-off voting pilot project.