

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 2205

As Passed House:
February 10, 2012

Title: An act relating to voter registration for sixteen and seventeen year olds.

Brief Description: Allowing eligible youth at least sixteen years of age to register to vote.

Sponsors: Representatives Billig, Zeiger, Fitzgibbon, Hudgins, Hunt, Green, Sells, McCoy, Maxwell, Probst, Jinkins, Pettigrew, Darneille, Eddy, Upthegrove, Hope, Ormsby, Blake, Miloscia, Hansen, Goodman, Carlyle, Kagi, Van De Wege, Pedersen, Tharinger, Kenney, Orwall, Moeller, Wylie, Appleton, Ladenburg, Lytton, Reykdal, Stanford, Pollet and Hasegawa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 1/12/12, 1/23/12 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/10/12, 56-40.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Authorizes persons who are at least 16 years old, and who meet all other voter registration requirements, to register to vote with the Office of the Secretary of State.
- Establishes that the voter registration of 16 and 17-year-olds will be withheld from entry into the Statewide Voter Registration Database until such time as the voter will be 18 years old before the next election.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Darneille, Dunshee, Hurst, McCoy and Miloscia.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Taylor, Ranking Minority Member; Overstreet, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander and Condotta.

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.

Staff: Thamas Osborn (786-7129).

Background:

Eligibility for voter registration requires that a person be a United States citizen and at least 18 years old on or before the next election.

Designated state agencies, including the Department of Motor Vehicles and the Department of Social and Health Services, are required to provide voter registration services to agency clients and/or the public.

Currently, eight states and the District of Columbia authorize individuals younger than 18 years old to preregister to vote. The eight states are:

- Delaware;
- Hawaii;
- Florida;
- Maryland;
- North Carolina;
- Rhode Island;
- California; and
- Oregon.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

The act authorizes persons who are at least 16 years old, and who meet all other voter registration requirements, to register to vote with the Office of the Secretary of State. Such registration will be withheld from entry into the Statewide Voter Registration Database until such time as the voter will be 18 years old before the next election. Once the voter turns 18 years old, he or she will be sent notice confirming that his or her voter registration has been entered into the Statewide Voter Registration Database and that he or she is now eligible to vote.

In order to implement voter registration for qualifying 16 and 17-year-olds, the act revises the various voter registration application procedures utilized by designated state agencies.

The Secretary of State is authorized to adopt rules necessary to implement the provisions of the act. In promulgating such rules, the Secretary of State is encouraged to establish a system to maintain an accurate record of the current residential addresses of registrants.

The act takes effect on July 1, 2013.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2013.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Voter participation is the cornerstone of democracy. By allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to preregister, this bill would do much to increase voter participation and interest in the election process by young people. Eighteen to 24-year-olds have the lowest voter participation rates and this bill would help cure this problem. Presently, 40 percent of new voters register when they get their driver's licenses, but 16 and 17-year-olds are cut out of this process. Passage of the bill would mean that high schools could be actively involved in voter registration. Early registration would increase participation in elections and encourage young people to get involved in the political process. Voting and civic participation are learned habits that should be inculcated into high school students. Increasing the voting rates of students would be beneficial to democracy and would motivate students to learn about the political process.

(Opposed) This bill represents bad policy because it would negatively impact elections management. The registration information of 16 and 17-year-olds would grow stale and obsolete by the time they turn 18 years old. This would present problems in keeping track of which voters in the database remain eligible to vote. County auditors would have trouble contacting many of these young voters. Many individuals would be on the registration roles who have left the state or area. Also, the bill would significantly increase the elections costs borne by counties. Counties and cities simply do not have the funds to implement this bill.

Washington is on the cutting edge regarding voter registration efforts. Our state was voted number one by Rock the Vote regarding the facilitation of voter registration by young people. Sixty thousand postcards are sent each year to 18-year-olds reminding them to register. Passage of this bill would mean that federal funding could not be used for voter registration purposes. Funding would have to come out of general funds allocated to the Office of the Secretary of State.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Billig, prime sponsor; Representative Zeiger; Lucas Barash-David, Associated Students of the University of Washington; Toby Crittenden, Washington Bus; Steve Zemke, King County Democrats; Shelby Pelon, Associated Students of Eastern Washington University; and Kim Abel, League of Women Voters of Washington.

(Opposed) Skip Moore, Chelan County Auditor; and Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.