

SENATE BILL REPORT

EHB 2205

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Government Operations, Tribal Relations & Elections, February 21, 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: Passed House: 2/10/12, 56-40.

Committee Activity: Government Operations, Tribal Relations & Elections: 2/16/12, 2/21/12 [DP, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Pridemore, Chair; Prentice, Vice Chair; Chase and Nelson.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Swecker, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

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

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

- Delaware;
- Hawaii;
- Florida;
- Maryland;
- North Carolina;

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- Rhode Island;
- California; and
- Oregon.

Washington allows persons younger than 18 to register to vote if they will be 18 on or before the next election.

Summary of Bill: A person who is at least 16 years old and who meets all other voter registration requirements is authorized 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, the voter will be sent notice confirming that his or her voter registration has been entered into the Statewide Voter Registration Database and that the voter 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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: By allowing 16 and 17 year-olds to pre-register to vote, the bill does much to increase voter participation and interest in the election process. Young people between the ages of 16 and 18 are a very stable group in terms of moving and address changes. Most of the people in this age range are still at home with their parents, finishing high school. Eighteen to 24 year-olds have the lowest voter participation rates and this bill would help address this problem. Grabbing young people early and engaging them in the process will promote increased voter turnout later in life. Voting and civic participation are learned habits. Motor voter doesn't grab the 16 and 17 year age group, because once kids get their license, they don't return until they turn 21.

CON: Registration information for 16 and 17 year-olds will quickly grow stale once these kids graduate and leave home. This creates great difficulty in making sure voter roles are accurate as to which people can vote. Sixty thousand post cards are sent to 18 year-olds each year reminding them to register and vote. This bill does not include a funding mechanism for how to maintain a pre-registration voter bank that needs to be able to register into the actual voter data bank. Seventeen and 18 year-old kids are very mobile. Many leave home to attend college, get a job, or join the military. This is not a stable age group. Registering a

young person may raise false expectations. A young person who registers at age 16 may then expect a ballot in return. What if that young person never updates their address?

Persons Testifying: PRO: Toby Crittenden, WA BUS; Shelby Pelon, WA Students Assn.; Lonnie Johns-Brown, League of Women Voters; Carrie Tellefson, Peninsula High School.

CON: Kim Wyman, WA Assn. of County Auditors; Walt Washington, Kitsap County Auditors; Katie Blinn, Secretary of State.