

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 1267

As Passed House:
January 27, 2014

Title: An act relating to extending the time period for voter registration.

Brief Description: Concerning voter registration.

Sponsors: Representatives Fitzgibbon, S. Hunt, Stanford, Appleton, Ryu, Van De Wege, Lytton, Tharinger, Hudgins, Lias, Upthegrove, Farrell, Cody, Sawyer, Jinkins, Roberts, Reykdal, Maxwell, Riccelli, Santos, Pollet, Bergquist, Hansen and Ormsby.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Operations & Elections: 2/6/13, 2/12/13 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/7/13, 64-33.

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 1/27/14, 59-37.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Changes the time period for online registration from 29 to 11 days before a primary or election.
- Changes the time period for in-person registration from 8 to 11 days before a primary or election.
- Changes the time period for mail-in registrations from 29 to 28 days before a primary or election.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives S. Hunt, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Carlyle, Fitzgibbon, Orwall and Van De Wege.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Buys, Ranking Minority Member; Taylor, Ranking Minority Member; Kristiansen, Manweller and Alexander.

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: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

The deadline for registering to vote and participating in an upcoming primary or election is 29 days before that primary or election for mail-in or online registrations. A person may also register in person at the county auditor's office no later than eight days before the primary or election.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

The deadlines for registering to vote and participating in an upcoming primary or election are changed. Registrations sent through the mail must be submitted no later than 28 days before the primary or election. Electronic and in-person registrations must be submitted to the county auditor's office, or at an alternate location designated by the county auditor, no later than 11 days before the primary or election.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Nine different states require election day registration, and California is in the process of adopting same day registration. Voter turnout is better in states that have same day registration. Online registration has been very successful in Washington, and the deadline is 29 days before an election. The deadline is being moved to eight days. Every person should have a voice in democracy. Making sure your registration is up-to-date is critical, especially for young people who move every three years. Many universities in the state begin fall quarter just two weeks before the deadline for the general election registration period. That deadline does not allow enough time to get students registered. In 2008 6 million Americans did not vote because they missed the voter registration deadline or did not know how to register to vote. Online registration is very helpful, particularly for college students, but out-of-state students cannot register online. Election day registration will help with campus voter registration drives. At Central Washington University, 800 registrations were collected in the few weeks before the deadline. Even more will be possible with election day registration.

(Opposed) If the bill is adopted it would have a tremendous impact on counties. Washington is a vote-by-mail state and is significantly different from other states. It takes time to get a person registered to vote. It involves assigning the voter to a precinct, entering their information into the voter registration database, and then mailing a ballot. Other states that have gone to election day registration have reported a 3 percent increase in registrants, which translates to about 800 or 900 people registering to vote in Grays Harbor County on the day of an election. It would require about 400 work hours to process those registrations.

Washington's election system is ranked as second best in the nation. The auditors' preference

would be to allow voter registration up to 11 days before an election. This would allow a week to get information processed and the ballot mailed to the voter. The impact of election day registration on staffing levels would be big, and even bigger in the year of a presidential election. More people will have to be hired. Using provisional ballots is one solution to the problem of providing election day registration. There are ways to move toward election day registration that do not create problems. Encouraging people to use the online registration system would be helpful. Of the eight or nine states that allow election day registration, voter participation is better in four of those states. Washington was ranked as having the second best election system in the nation by a Pew Charitable Trust study. The gains in voter participation that have occurred in other states, likely will not be as high in Washington. It makes sense to take an incremental approach, such as allowing online registration up to 11 days before an election. While the auditors are committed to providing access to voter registration, there are significant differences among the states that vote at the polls and those that vote entirely by mail. The cost to register voters on election day is significant. No matter what the deadline is, some people will wait until the last minute. There needs to be sufficient time to make sure that only properly registered voters get ballots. Online registration also takes staff time to make sure the voter gets the proper ballot and there is time to get the ballot to them. Election day registration is primarily a cost issue. The financial effect on counties would be huge. Election related costs are distributed to other jurisdictions in the county. The voter registration deadlines used to be 30 and 15 days before an election. In previous years, the deadlines were moved as part of a compromise. Pushing registration deadlines affects the entire process. For example, not as many ballots will be processed on election day.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Fitzgibbon, prime sponsor; Abigail Doerr, The Washington Bus; and Jackie Sperlich, Associated Students of Central Washington University.

(Opposed) Vern Spatz, Grays Harbor County Auditor's Office; Karen Martin, Walla Walla County Auditor's Office; Trent England, Freedom Foundation; Greg Kimsey, Clark County Auditor's Office; Jerry Pettit, Kittitas County Auditor's Office; and Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.