
Government Operations & Elections Committee

HB 1278

Brief Description: Concerning prepaid postage for ballot envelopes.

Sponsors: Representatives Bergquist, Van De Wege, Fitzgibbon, Hunt, Appleton, Jinkins, Ryu, Reykdal, Stanford, Tharinger, Hudgins, Santos, Pollet and Ormsby.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the state to reimburse counties for the cost of return postage on ballot return envelopes for certain elections.
- Clarifies requirements for what must be printed in the ballot materials.

Hearing Date: 1/29/13

Staff: Jasmine Vasavada (786-7301).

Background:

In 2011, Washington became the second state in the nation to adopt an entirely vote-by-mail system, requiring all counties to conduct elections entirely by mail ballot. Elections are administered at the local level by county auditors (except King County, which has a Department of Records and Elections). The county auditor sends each voter a ballot with instructions and a declaration that the voter must sign, a security envelope in which to conceal the ballot after voting, and a larger envelope in which to return the security envelope. For overseas and service voters, the signed declaration constitutes the equivalent of voter registration.

Payment of election costs

Although counties conduct elections, they are not responsible for all election costs. Every city, town, and district is liable for its proportionate share of the costs when such elections are held in conjunction with other elections. Similarly, the state pays a prorated share of the costs of the following elections:

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- state primaries and general elections held in odd-numbered years when state officers or measures are voted upon; and
- primary or vacancy elections held to fill a vacancy for United States senator or representative.

For the elections listed above, the county auditor apportions the state's share of the election expense and files an expense claim with the Secretary of State.

Summary of Bill:

Counties must include a ballot return envelope with prepaid postage in the following elections:

- primary and general elections held in even-numbered years; and
- special elections to fill unexpired terms of statewide elected officials and state legislators.

Counties are reimbursed by the state for the costs of return postage on ballot return envelopes in the elections listed above.

Requirements for what must be printed on the ballot are clarified. The ballot materials must provide space for the voter to sign the declaration, indicate the date of voting, and include a telephone number.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 1/25/13.

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