

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1510

As Reported by House Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections

Title: An act relating to write-in voting.

Brief Description: Modifying write-in voting provisions.

Sponsors: Representative Appleton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Operations & Elections: 2/13/13, 2/19/13 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires write-in candidates to file a declaration of candidacy 18 days before a primary or election.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Buys, Ranking Minority Member; Taylor, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Carlyle, Fitzgibbon, Kristiansen, Manweller, Orwall and Van De Wege.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

Election law allows any person to file for an office as a write-in candidate. Write-in candidates may file a declaration of candidacy for the office, but are not required to do so. A person may not file as a write-in candidate under the following conditions:

- the person attempting to file has filed as a write-in candidate for the same office or the person's name appeared on the ballot for the same office at the preceding primary;
- the person attempting to file has already filed a valid write-in declaration for that primary or election;
- the name of the person attempting to file already appears on the ballot as a candidate for another office, other than precinct committee officer; or

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- the office filed for is committee precinct officer.

The number of write-in votes cast for each office must be recorded and reported with the canvass for the election. A write-in vote for an individual candidate is not tabulated unless:

- the difference between the number of votes cast for the two candidates receiving the most votes and the write-in candidate is less than the total number of write-in votes for the office; or
 - a manual recount is conducted for that office.
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Summary of Bill:

A write-in candidate must file a declaration of candidacy for an office not later than 18 days before the primary or election. Write-in votes cast for any person who has not filed a declaration of candidacy are not valid.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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) The county auditors brought this bill forward. If candidates are required to declare candidacy before the election, the auditors could ignore the write-in votes that are not serious, such as those for Mickey Mouse. The Washington State Association of County Auditors support the bill. Ballots that have write-in candidates require that the ballot be duplicated, even if the ballot is for a make-believe candidate. In a recent Pierce County race, the write-ins of 2,100 individual names, ranging from "Alice in Wonderland" to "your mama," had to be tallied. Every name had to be entered and it took an entire weekend. This bill will help bring down the cost of elections and will help get results sooner. The Association of Washington Counties supports the bill. Dealing with write-in candidates that are not serious affects county canvassing boards. The policy of this bill will help make the process much better. There were a number of recent legislative races in which write-in candidates declared. The bill gets rid of accounting for the random verbage and editorializing that appears on ballots. The public would be surprised to know the dollar value of resources spent researching "none of the above."

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Appleton, prime sponsor; Julie Anderson, Washington State Association of County Auditors; Monty Cobb, Washington Association of County Officials; and Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.