

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5027

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Governmental Operations, January 29, 2013

Title: An act relating to prepaid postage for primary and general election ballots.

Brief Description: Requiring prepaid postage for primary and general election ballots.

Sponsors: Senator Hasegawa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Governmental Operations: 1/22/13, 1/29/13 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Benton, Vice Chair; Braun, Conway, Fraser, Hasegawa, Ranking Member; Rivers.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: All counties conduct elections entirely by mail. County auditors must send each voter a ballot and a voter declaration that must be signed. A security envelope in which to conceal the ballot after voting, and a larger envelope in which to return the security envelope must be sent with the ballot. The voter also must receive instructions on how to obtain information about the election, how to complete the ballot, and how to return the ballot to the county auditor.

For the ballot to be counted, the voter must either return the ballot to the county auditor no later than 8:00 p.m. the day of the election or mail the ballot to the county auditor with a postmark on the larger envelope no later than the day of the election.

Summary of Bill: Return envelopes for primary and general election ballots must include prepaid postage. The state must reimburse counties for the cost of placing prepaid postage on mail and absentee ballots in primary and general elections.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill lowers barriers to participation in elections, especially with all voters voting by mail. A couple of elections ago, the ballot in King County was so large, it required two stamps. If you only put one on, your ballot could have been returned. Students often pay bills online now. Who has a spare stamp laying around? People may fill out the ballot with good intentions and forget to mail the ballot because they do not have a stamp laying around. We want to make sure students continue to vote and have ease of participation in elections. Students often don't have stamps lying around. I was surprised to find out I had to pay postage to mail my ballot.

OTHER: The Secretary of State's primary issue is who is going to pay for this and if this can get funded in the budget. It could be confusing to the public if there is one system for special elections, and another for primary and general elections. County auditors want to make it easy and efficient for voters, but are concerned about funding for the Secretary of State's office so the counties are not left holding the bag. Counties will bankroll the cost until reimbursement can take place. If there is a primary early in the year, it could be until the next March until reimbursement takes place. Special elections could put direct costs onto the counties, which could be passed onto the taxpayers or absorbed into reimbursement costs.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Hasegawa, prime sponsor; Tristan Hanon, Associated Students of Washington State University.

OTHER: Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State; Monty Cobb, WA Assn. of County Officials.