

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5320

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Governmental Operations, February 11, 2013

Title: An act relating to ballot drop boxes.

Brief Description: Requiring the county auditor to establish a minimum number of ballot drop boxes for counties and cities.

Sponsors: Senators Becker, Benton, Roach, Ericksen, Honeyford and Shin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Governmental Operations: 2/05/13, 2/11/13 [DP, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Benton, Vice Chair; Braun and Hasegawa, Ranking Member.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Fraser.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: County auditors must open a voting center in the county auditor's office that must remain open during business hours during the voting period. The voting period begins 18 days before an election and ends at 8:00 p.m. on the day of an election. The voting center must provide voter registration materials, replacement ballots, provisional ballots, disability access voting devices, sample ballots, instructions on how to vote using the ballot, a ballot drop box, and voters' pamphlets – if published. The voting center must be accessible to persons with disabilities and must provide at least one voting unit that provides access to individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

County auditors are permitted to provide election services at locations in addition to the required voting center. The services provided at the additional locations, and the days and hours the additional locations are open, are at the county auditor's discretion. Ballots must be removed according to statutory procedures and all ballot drop boxes must be secured at 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election.

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.

Summary of Bill: County auditors must establish a minimum of one ballot drop box per 20,000 residents or one ballot drop box per city with a population greater than 1000, whichever number is greater.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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: We need a way for people to get their ballots in earlier without having to mail ballots in and depend on the mail. People are concerned that their ballots aren't getting in and their voices aren't being heard. Pierce County does this now and is a leader. Students want to have more say in the process and are active civically. Ballot drop boxes are a great way to engage students, who are an underrepresented voting population. Students are willing to fund ballot drop boxes on college campuses.

CON: County auditors owe their voters an obligation to spend more wisely. Elections are grossly inefficient because we prioritize timely results and ease of participation over cost. This bill increases costs and micromanages the elections process beyond the benefits received. We don't know if the bill will provide better accessibility. One standard doesn't necessarily apply to all sizes of counties. This is a one-size-fits-all policy that has not been analyzed for cost-effectiveness on a county-by-county basis.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Becker, prime sponsor; Jaclyn Sperlick, Associated Students of Central WA University; Gabriel Bowman, University of WA Tacoma.

CON: Vern Spatz, Grays Harbor Co. Auditor; Matt Beaton, Jerry Pettit, WA State Assn. of County Auditors.