
State Government Committee

HB 2682

Brief Description: Providing automatic voter registration at qualified voter registration agencies.

Sponsors: Representatives S. Hunt, Kilduff, Appleton, Orwall, Bergquist, Reykdal, Stanford, Pettigrew, Gregerson, Ormsby, Hickel, Frame and Pollet; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes qualified voter registration agencies.
- Provides for automatic voter registration of eligible individuals applying for services or assistance at qualified voter registration agencies.
- Makes certain activities by an employee of a qualified voter registration agency a gross misdemeanor.

Hearing Date: 1/21/16

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

National Voter Registration Act

Among the provisions of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA), popularly known as “Motor Voter,” is a requirement for states to provide for simultaneous voter registration when citizens apply for a new, or renew an existing, driver’s license or identification card. In Washington, driver’s licensing agents ask applicants for driver’s licenses or identicards whether the applicant wants to register to vote or update his or her voter registration. An applicant for a standard driver's license or identicard is not asked to disclose his or her citizenship or legal residency status unless he or she chooses to register to vote. If an applicant registers to vote, the Department of Licensing (DOL) transmits that voter's registration information to the Secretary of State (SOS).

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.

The NVRA also allows the governor to designate other agencies to perform voter registration activities. In addition to the DOL, the governor has designated the following as voter registration assistance agencies:

- Department of Health;
- Department of Services for the Blind;
- Department of Social and Health Services;
- Health Benefit Exchange; and
- Health Care Authority.

In 2015, automatic voter registration laws were enacted in California and Oregon. These are the first states to adopt automatic voter registration. Both require proof of U.S. citizenship or legal presence from driver's license and identification card applicants.

Washington State Voter Registration Database

The SOS maintains a centralized voter registration database containing the name and registration information of every legally registered voter in the state. Registration information shared with the SOS through the DOL database is validated and added to this official list of registered voters. The electronic signature on a drivers' license or identocard application or renewal may serve as the electronic signature for voter registration purposes.

Other

Voter violations, including knowingly registering to vote when unqualified, providing false voter registration information, and making a false declaration about voter qualifications, are punishable as Class C felonies.

A person who knowingly tampers with a registration form or intentionally fails to return another person's registration form is guilty of a gross misdemeanor. This does not apply to the voter who completed the form or to a county auditor who is acting as authorized by law.

The Address Confidentiality Program (ACP), administered by the SOS, helps certain criminal justice employees and victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, or stalking keep their addresses secret. Program participants may register to vote without creating a public record.

Summary of Bill:

Qualified Voter Registration Agencies

Beginning January 1, 2017, the DOL, Health Benefit Exchange (HBE), and other agencies providing public assistance or services to persons with disabilities and designated by the governor, are established as Qualified Voter Registration Agencies (QVRA). The agency must collect the name, address, birthdate, signature, and citizenship information of individuals as part of their regular provision of services in order to be a QVRA.

Transmission of Existing Records

Each QVRA must promptly transmit to the SOS the name, residential and mailing addresses, birthdate, and acknowledgement of U.S citizenship for each person for whom the agency retains this information on January 1, 2017. With the exception of the HBE, QVRAs must also transmit

a digital copy of each person's signature. Information transmitted for voter registration purposes is not subject to public disclosure.

For each person who is not currently registered to vote and whose information is transmitted, the SOS must send notice explaining that voter registration is voluntary, and if the person does not decline to register within 60 days he or she will be registered to vote. The notice may not identify the agency transmitting the original data and must provide information for:

1. how to decline registration;
2. voting eligibility criteria;
3. how to correct any missing or incorrect registration information; and
4. the ACP.

If the person does not decline to register to vote within 60 days of the notification, the SOS must register that person to vote. If the SOS receives voter registration information within 21 days of an election, the SOS must wait until after the election to register the person.

Voter Registration

Beginning January 1, 2017, a QVRA must inform applicants for assistance that the applicant will be registered to vote unless he or she declines or is found to be ineligible. The QVRA must also inform applicants: (1) of the qualifications for becoming a registered voter; (2) of the penalties for knowingly registering when ineligible or providing false registration information; (3) that voter registration is voluntary and will not impact that individual's eligibility for other services or benefits; (4) that the person's choice to register or not register will not be used for any other purpose; and (5) about the ACP. The applicant's transaction with the agency will not be completed until the applicant is given the opportunity to decline being registered to vote.

A QVRA must provide the SOS, in a format determined by the SOS, voter registration information for individuals who do not decline to be registered. Voter registration information includes the person's name, residential and mailing addresses, birthdate, acknowledgment that the person is a U.S. citizen, a digital copy of the person's signature, and an affirmation of the person's eligibility to be a registered voter. The HBE is exempted from the requirement to provide the person's digital signature; however, the HBE is directed to provide the SOS sufficient information to allow the SOS to obtain a digital copy of the person's signature.

Upon receiving voter registration information, the SOS must determine whether the person is eligible to be registered to vote or requires an updated voter registration, and subsequently provide that information to the county auditor of the county in which the person may be registered. The county auditor must then register that person to vote or update the voter registration information. The voter registration submitted is considered an electronic voter registration.

If the SOS receives voter registration with 21 days of an election, the SOS must wait until after the election to provide the county auditor with the registration information.

The county auditor must promptly send a notification to each person who is registered to vote or whose existing voter registration was updated.

Other

If a person does not know he or she is ineligible to vote and becomes registered through a QVRA, or subsequently unknowingly attempts to vote or votes illegally as a result of being registered, that person is presumed to have acted with official authorization and is not guilty of a Class C felony.

An employee of a qualified voter registration agency is guilty of a gross misdemeanor if he or she: willfully neglects, refuses to perform, or performs in an incorrect manner any duty required by law in connection with the registration of voters; enters, causes, or permits to be entered on the voter registration records the name of any person not entitled to be registered; or destroys, conceals, or alters any registration record except as authorized by voter registration law.

The identity of the office or agency at which a person registered to vote, and a person's choice whether or not to register, are not subject to public disclosure.

Registered voters may submit an address change for voter registration purposes to a QVRA.

Appropriation: The sum of \$400,000 GF-S is appropriated to the Secretary of State.

Fiscal Note: Requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on January 1, 2017, except section 11, relating to the appropriation, which takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.