

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5344

As of February 13, 2015

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

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

Sponsors: Senators Hasegawa, Roach, Liias, Billig, Kohl-Welles, Jayapal, Chase and Conway.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Security (Note: Senate Resolution 8609 adopted January 27, 2015, renamed the Committee on Government Operations & State Security to Committee on Government Operations & Security): 1/26/15, 2/12/15 [DP-WM].

Ways & Means:

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & SECURITY

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

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Benton, Vice Chair; Pearson, Vice Chair; Liias, Ranking Minority Member; McCoy.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Steve Jones (786-7440)

Background: All counties in the state conduct elections entirely by mail. County auditors must send each voter a ballot with 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. 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 a 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 dated no later than election day.

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: 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.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Government Operations & Security): PRO: This is about lowering barriers to participation in democracy. Being poor should not be a barrier to participation. The price of a stamp is not insignificant; people do many transactions online now and don't have stamps laying around. This opens up our process to everyone and makes it as convenient as possible. The Post Office currently delivers ballots without a stamp, then gets compensated for the cost.

CON: The problem with metered mail, as would be used here, is not having an accurate postmark. Although some auditors are working with postal officials to get the issue worked out, it depends on machinery that's being used. Being able to identify when a ballot is mailed is part of the process of maintaining the integrity of balloting systems. This is a reimbursement bill; it would cost counties a fairly significant amount of money to do this if an actual physical stamp is used. This can raise an issue for counties fronting the money.

OTHER: Philosophically, the Secretary of State supports the bill, but has two technical concerns: the cost of the bill and the ability of the Postal Service to postmark the ballots accurately. Normally the Postal Service doesn't postmark mail with prepaid postage on it. Within the state, we can work with the Postal Service to make sure the postmark gets on; we don't have that kind of influence outside of the state. Counties are required to have two ballot drop boxes.

Persons Testifying (Government Operations & Security): PRO: Senator Hasegawa, prime sponsor.

CON: Monty Cobb, WA Assn. of County Officials.

OTHER: Toni McKinley-Camp, Sheryl Moss, Office of the Secretary of State.