State Government, Elections & Information Technology Committee

HB 1567

Brief Description: Concerning modification of precinct and district boundary lines.

Sponsors: Representatives Koster, Dolan, Griffey and Muri; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Transfers the authority to establish election precinct boundaries from the county legislative authority to the county auditor.

- Provides exceptions to the requirement that precincts be contiguous.

- Moves certain deadlines for the submission of the Redistricting Commission's redistricting plan to the Legislature, and the adoption of a plan by the Supreme Court when applicable.

Hearing Date: 1/10/18

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

Precinct Boundaries.
Precincts are geographical subdivisions used for election administration purposes, such as electing precinct committee officers. The county legislative authority divides the county into election precincts and establishes the precinct boundaries. However, the county auditor must temporarily adjust boundaries to reflect an annexation or incorporation of a territory, which are effective until modifications are adopted by the county legislative authority. Except for such adjustments, election precinct boundaries cannot change during the period beginning 14 days before the first day for candidate filings for primary elections until the day of the general 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.

Voting precincts must be entirely within a single congressional district, legislative district, district of a county legislative authority, and, if applicable, a city. Precincts must be as contiguous and compact as practicable. Changes to precinct boundaries must follow visible, physical features on the most current United State Census Bureau maps, unless changes are necessitated by annexation or incorporation of territory, or doing so would substantially impair election administration in the impacted area. If such exception applies, the county auditor must send the Secretary of State a copy of the description, a map of the changes, and a statement of the applicable exception. For exceptions relating to the impairment of election administration, the county auditor must include a statement of the reasons why following visible physical features would substantially impair election administration. After a precinct boundary change, the county auditor is responsible for sending a copy of the map delineating the new precinct boundaries to the respective city clerk.

Voter Limits.
Election precincts are limited to 1,500 active registered voters, although the county legislative authority may adopt an ordinance to establish a lower maximum active registered voter limit.

Redistricting.
The Redistricting Commission (Commission) is constitutionally required to be established every 10 years to provide for the redistricting of state legislative and congressional districts based on the federal decennial census. The Commission must prepare a redistricting plan that meets certain statutory requirements and submit the plan to the Legislature, after three of the Commission's voting members approves the plan, no later than the January 1 of the year ending in two. If the three voting members fail to approve the plan by the deadline, the Supreme Court must adopt a plan by March 1 of the year ending in two.

Summary of Bill:

Precinct Boundaries.
The authority to divide the county into election precincts and establish precinct boundaries is transferred to the county auditor. Precinct boundaries may be modified up to seven days prior to the first day for candidates to file to run in the primary election. The responsibility to formally adopt the temporarily adjusted boundaries created by the county auditor to reflect an annexation or incorporation of a territory, is transferred to the county auditor. After a precinct boundary change, the county auditor is no longer required to send a copy of the maps delineating the new precinct boundaries to the city or town clerk.

Voting precincts must be entirely within or entirely outside of any city or town, and, where applicable, a single council district or ward of that city or town. An unincorporated area entirely surrounded by one or more cities or towns or an unincorporated area located between city, town, or district boundaries may be combined in a single precinct with other similar areas or nearby unincorporated territory. Noncontiguous incorporated areas of the same city or town may be included in the geographically nearest precinct of that city or town. Precinct boundaries are no longer required to follow visible physical features delineated on the United State Census Bureau maps, thereby also eliminating the related statutory exceptions. Precinct boundaries must instead preferentially follow local jurisdictional and electoral district boundaries and visible physical features.

<u>Voter limits</u>.
Counties may no longer establish maximum active registered voter limits of less than 1,500 active registered voters for each election precinct.

<u>Redistricting</u>.
The Commission must submit its redistricting plan to the Legislature by November 20 of each year ending in one. If the Commission fails to approve the plan by the deadline, the Supreme Court must adopt a plan by February 1 of the year ending in two.

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.