

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2297

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government, Elections & Information Technology

Title: An act relating to extending the period for voter registration.

Brief Description: Extending the period for voter registration.

Sponsors: Representatives Dolan, Hudgins, Lytton, Cody, Goodman, Pettigrew, Tarleton, Bergquist, Fitzgibbon, Slatter, Wylie, Robinson, Tharinger, Kagi, Morris, Orwall, Valdez, Kilduff, Frame, Stanford, Clibborn, Macri, Jenkins, Ormsby, Ryu, Pollet, Doglio, Ortiz-Self, Stonier, Appleton and Gregerson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government, Elections & Information Technology: 1/9/18, 1/10/18 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires that voter registration by mail and electronically must be received no later than eight days before the election date, rather than submitted 29 days before the election date.
- Changes the deadline for in-person voter registration from eight days before the election date to 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election.
- Changes the deadline to update existing voter registration information from 29 days before the election date to 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election.
- Requires county auditors to accept in-person voter registration at certain locations within the county.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, ELECTIONS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Appleton, Gregerson and Pellicciotti.

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.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives McDonald, Ranking Minority Member; Kraft, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Irwin and Johnson.

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

Voter Registration Deadlines.

To register to vote, a person must submit a registration electronically or by mail no later than 29 days before the election date, or in person at his or her county auditor's office no later than eight days before the election date.

A person who is already registered to vote may update his or her voter registration no later than 29 days before the date of the election.

Voting Centers.

Each county auditor must open a voting center at least 18 days before each election. The voting center must provide certain voting materials and equipment, including voter registration materials, ballots, provisional ballots, disability access voting units, sample ballots, instructions on how to properly vote the ballot, a ballot drop box, and voters' pamphlets when applicable. The county auditor may provide election services at locations in addition to the voting center and has discretion to determine which services will be provided at the additional locations.

Voters Pamphlet.

When at least one statewide measure or office is scheduled to appear on the general election ballot, the Secretary of State (Secretary) must print and distribute a voters' pamphlet. The pamphlet must contain certain information, for example, information about measures for advisory vote, statements from candidates, contact information for the public disclosure commission and major political parties, a brief statement explaining addition or deletion of language for a proposed measure, and arguments in favor of and against a statewide ballot issue.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Voter Registration Deadlines.

To register to vote electronically or by mail, a voter registration application must be received no later than eight days before the election date. A person may also register in person at the county auditor's office, a voting center, or other location designated by the county auditor up to 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election. A person who is already registered may update their voter registration up to 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election.

The Secretary must establish procedures to record the new or updated voter registrations on an expedited basis.

Voting Centers.

The county auditor must register voters in person at the county auditor's office and the division of elections if it is in a different city from the county auditor's office. For presidential general elections, the county auditor must open additional voting centers to accept in-person registration in each city in the county with a population of 100,000 or more, except for cities where the county auditor's office or division of elections is located and is accepting in-person registration. These additional voting centers are not required to be open on the Sunday before the presidential election.

At least one of the additional locations designated by the county auditor for accepting in-person voter registration must provide the same services as voting centers. Voting centers must be located in public buildings, or a building that is leased by a public entity, such as libraries.

Voters Pamphlet.

The Secretary must include in the 2018 general election voter pamphlet information pertaining to the changes in voter registration deadlines.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill requires that voter registration by mail and electronically must be received no later than 8 days before the election date. The locations where voting centers must be located is expanded to also include buildings that are leased by a public entity. The Secretary must include in the 2018 General Election Voter Pamphlet information pertaining to the changes in voter registration deadlines.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: This bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed, except for sections 1 through 4, relating to extending the period for voter registration and providing additional locations for in-person registration, which take effect June 30 2019.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) In 2016 over 1 million Washington residents were eligible to vote, but were not registered. Registration is the most important policy to effect voter turnout. This bill will eliminate unnecessary and confusing deadlines that shut people out of democracy. Many people are not interested in the election until closer to election day when it is too late to register. Same-day voting is proven to increase voter turnout, especially in communities of color and among youth and those without a traditional address. Same-day voting increased youth turnout by 14 percent. In 2016 the six states with the highest turnout had same-day registration in place. These states were able to accomplish increased voter turnout through same-day registration without compromising election integrity. Once people vote, they become a "voter" and may continue to participate in elections. Small to mid-size counties

will need to shift resources, which is doable, but additional resources will be needed. Although this will require more resources, it is the right thing to do.

(Opposed) An earlier deadline for transfer of voter registration information is preferable to avoid the risk of double voting. With the voter registration database modernization effort underway, a phased-in approach to the deadlines would work better to allow this to be implemented in a secure way.

(Other) Although advancing election deadlines, especially online registrations, makes sense, there are concerns about workload and local impact. This is especially true since the state does not pay for its share of even-year election costs. The 29-day deadline for in-state transfers who need to update their address should be moved to 28 days. Updating addresses is more of a customer service issue than an issue of enfranchisement. Being able to slow down and manage workload for election administrators who will be inputting data into the new registration system will help the smaller and less resourced counties keep up with data entry.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Dolan, prime sponsor; Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor's Office; Julie Wise, King County Auditor's Office; Dolores Gilmore, Washington State Association of County Auditors; Alison Eisinger, Seattle King County Coalition on Homelessness; Kathy Sakahara, League of Women Voters of Washington; Sean Jacobson and Christ Esh, The Washington Bus; Cindy Black, Fix Democracy First; James Paribello, Washington Voting Justice Coalition; and RaShelle Davis, Office of the Governor.

(Opposed) Kim Wyman and Lori Augino, Office of the Secretary of State.

(Other) Julie Anderson, Washington State Association of County Auditors.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.