

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2406

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

Title: An act relating to ensuring the integrity of elections through strengthening election security practices around auditing and equipment.

Brief Description: Concerning election security practices around auditing and equipment.

Sponsors: Representatives Hudgins, Stanford and Ormsby.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government, Elections & Information Technology: 1/12/18, 1/23/18 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the county auditor to audit the election results, prior to certification of the election, using at least one of four methods provided and authorizes sealed ballot containers to be opened for such audits.
- Requires a manufacturer or distributor of a certified voting system or component thereof to disclose certain breaches of the security of its system.
- Authorizes the Secretary of State (Secretary) to decertify a voting system or component thereof for certain reasons.
- Requires the Secretary to adopt procedures to investigate the cause of any discrepancy found during an audit.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, ELECTIONS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; McDonald, Ranking Minority Member; Kraft, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Gregerson, Irwin and Pellicciotti.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Johnson.

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.

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

Election Audits.

Prior to certification of the election, the county auditor must audit the results of votes cast on the direct recording electronic voting devices (DRE). A DRE is a machine that directly records a voter's choice. All DREs must produce a paper record of each vote that may be accepted or rejected by the voter before finalizing their vote. To audit the DRE, the county auditor must randomly select up to 4 percent of the DRE devices or one DRE, whichever is greater, and compare the results recorded electronically on each DRE selected with the results shown on the paper record produced by the same machine.

In addition to an audit of votes cast on the DRE, a random check of the ballot counting equipment used to tabulate ballots may be conducted at the discretion of the county auditor, or upon mutual agreement of the political party observers. Under the random check process, a manual count of ballots is compared to the machine count. The size of the random check may involve up to either three precincts or six batches.

Ballot Containers.

After a ballot is tabulated, all ballots must be sealed in containers that identify the specific primary or election. The containers may only be opened by the canvassing board as part of the canvass, to conduct recounts, to conduct a random check of the original ballot counting equipment, or by order of the superior court in a contest or election dispute.

Voting Systems.

A voting system is the total combination of mechanical, electromechanical, or electronic equipment including the software, firmware, and documentation required to program, control, and support the equipment that is used to define ballots, cast and count votes, report or display election results, and maintain and produce any audit trail information.

The Secretary of State (Secretary) must inspect and certify all voting systems, or components of a system, prior to its use in the state. Under administrative rule, the Secretary may decertify a voting system or component thereof and withdraw authority for its future use or sale in the state if: (1) the system or component fails to meet the standards set in federal guidelines or state statute or rules; (2) the system or component was materially misrepresented in the certification or application process; or (3) the manufacturer or distributor installed unauthorized modifications to the certified software or hardware.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Election Audit.

Prior to certification of the election, the county auditor must conduct an audit using at least one of the following methods:

1. Audit of the DRE or Other In-Person Ballot Marking System.

An audit of the DREs is not required unless the county auditor chooses this audit method. If so, all other in-person ballot marking systems (systems) are subject to the same audit requirements as the DREs. This audit method may be used if there are races or issues with greater than 10 votes cast on all DREs or other systems in the county.

2. Random Check of the Ballot Counting Equipment.

A random check may be done by comparing the manual count or electronic count to the machine count from the original ballot counting equipment. The procedures adopted by the county canvassing board must comply with the rules adopted by the Secretary for the implementation and administration of audits. In addition, the procedures must include a process for expanding the audit in cases where a discrepancy is found.

3. Risk-Limiting Audit.

A risk-limiting audit is an audit protocol that makes use of statistical principles and methods and is designed to limit the risk of certifying an incorrect election outcome. There are two types of risk-limiting audits. The first type is a "comparison risk-limiting audit", in which the county auditor compares the voter markings on the ballot to the ballot-level cast vote record produced by the ballot counting equipment. The second type is a "ballot polling risk-limiting audit", which is used in counties where the ballot counting equipment does not produce a ballot-level cast vote record. In a ballot polling risk-limiting audit, the county auditor reports the markings on randomly selected ballots until the prespecified risk limit is met.

The Secretary must:

- set the risk limit, which is the largest statistical probability that an incorrect reported tabulation outcome is not detected in a risk-limiting audit;
- select at least one statewide contest, and at least one other ballot contest for each county, for audit. If there is no statewide contest, then the county auditor must select a ballot contest for audit; and
- establish procedures for implementation of risk-limiting audits.

4. Independent Electronic Audit of the Original Ballot Counting Equipment.

In an independent electronic audit of the original ballot counting equipment used in the county, the county auditor may choose to audit all ballots cast, or limit the audit to three precincts or six batches. The method of auditing must comply with procedures adopted by the county canvassing board.

The audit tool used must be an independent electronic audit system that is at least: (1) approved by the Secretary; (2) completely independent from all voting systems; (3) distributed or manufactured by a vendor different from the distributor or manufacturer of the original ballot counting equipment; and (4) capable of demonstrating that it can verify and confirm the accuracy of the original ballot counting equipment.

For each audit method, the Secretary must adopt procedures for expanding the audit to include additional ballots when the initial audit results in a discrepancy. The Secretary must adopt procedures to investigate the cause of any discrepancy found during an audit.

The Secretary must establish rules to implement and administer the auditing methods above.

Ballot Containers.

The sealed containers may be opened to conduct an audit of the DRE or other in-person ballot marking system, a risk-limiting audit, and an independent electronic audit of the original ballot counting equipment.

Voting Systems.

A voting system also includes mechanical, electromechanical, or electronic equipment that is used to perform an audit. A manufacturer or distributor of a certified voting system or component thereof must disclose to the Secretary and Attorney General any breach of the security of its system immediately, and without unreasonable delay, following discovery of the breach if:

- the breach has, or is reasonably likely to have, compromised the security, confidentiality, or integrity of an election in any state; or
- personal information of residents in any state was, or is reasonably believed to have been, acquired by an unauthorized person as a result of the breach and the personal information was not secured. "Personal information" includes a person's first name, or their first initial and last name, in combination with at least one of the following data elements: (1) Social Security number; (2) driver's license number or state identification card; or (3) the number of an account, credit or debit card, in combination with a code that would permit access to the person's financial account.

The Secretary may decertify a voting system or component thereof and withdraw authority for its future use or sale if the Secretary determines that:

- the system or component fails to meet the standards set forth in applicable federal guidelines;
- the system or component was materially misrepresented in the certification application;
- the applicant has installed unauthorized modifications to the certified software or hardware;
- the manufacturer or distributor of the system or component fails to comply with notification requirements in cases where notification of a breach is required; or
- any other reason authorized by rule adopted by the Secretary.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill:

- removes the prerequisite that the number of votes cast on the DRE or other system be statistically significant in relation to the election result before auditing the DRE or system;
- requires the selection of statewide contests in risk-limiting audits be done randomly, and that if there are no statewide contests that the county auditor, rather than the Secretary, is required to randomly select a contest;

- makes decertification permissive, rather than mandatory, for failures to report a breach and modifies the circumstances when the Secretary may decertify a voting system or component to be consistent with rules currently adopted;
 - requires the Secretary to adopt procedures to investigate the cause of any discrepancy found during an audit; and
 - removes provisions that provide for the supplemental audit of additional ballots upon request of a party or at the discretion of the county auditor.
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Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on January 23, 2018.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Colorado is the first state to implement risk-limiting audits. Under the bill, risk-limiting audits are not required but is permissive if counties choose to audit using this method. This gives auditors more flexibility and the goal is to increase confidence in the process and strengthen processes that are already in place. The ultimate test of accuracy in close races is a recount, but making some sort of audit mandatory will do a good job to augment what counties already do to test accuracy. Some in-person marking mechanisms do not retain information, so those machines will not be able to be audited. Auditing will increase voter confidence and trust in the system. Statistically based, post-election audits are an integral component of ensuring elections are secure and accurate. Such audits are the most economic component of a voting system that requires a small cost for a large benefit. Rhode Island recently passed robust election audit legislation.

Supplemental audits take time. It requires administrators to stop processing ballots and the public notification period is significant. If there is no reason triggering the expanded sample, there is no benefit to it. The bill is a step in the right direction, but should be more robust. There are checks and balances that can be put in place.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) All voting systems must be tested and certified by an independent testing authority designated by the federal Elections Assistance Commission prior to being inspected and tested by the Secretary. No voting system is or would be certified by the Secretary if it stores or requires voter personal information in order to cast a ballot. Recent data breaches in other states, such as Georgia and Illinois, were related to electronic poll books which are not used in Washington. Currently, the Secretary may decertify voting systems by rule. Elevating this to a statutory level is supported. Using methods related to risk-limiting audits will provide additional statistical evidence that the count was accurate, while keeping resources that auditors must use as low as possible. Four out of seven of the voting systems used in the state are capable of a comparison audit.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Hudgins, prime sponsor; Julie Anderson, Washington Association of County Auditors; Greg Kinsey, Clark County Auditor; Kirstin Mueller, League of Women Voters; and Cindy Black, Fix Democracy First.

(Other) Stuart Holmes, Office of the Secretary of State; and Denice Carnahan.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.