

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6021

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: Senate Committee on State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Kuderer, Billig, Darneille, Palumbo, Frockt, Rolfes, Lias, Keiser, Pedersen, Hunt, Wellman, Conway, Saldaña, Hasegawa, Mullet and Nelson).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government, Elections & Information Technology: 2/7/18, 2/15/18 [DP].

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 no later than 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: Do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Appleton, Gregerson and Pellicciotti.

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

Voter Registration Deadlines.

To register to vote, a person must submit a registration application 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 information no later than 29 days before the date of the election. If the person fails to transfer his or her residential address by this deadline, they may vote according to their previous registration address.

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 state 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 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 location for in-person registration is expanded to include the division of elections if it is located in a different city from the county auditor's office. Additionally, 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. 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 information pertaining to the changes in voter registration deadlines in the 2018 general election state voter pamphlet.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: 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 takes effect June 30, 2019.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Voter turnout is decreasing, and last year's general election turnout was at 37 percent. Modifying the registration deadlines will make it easier for people to participate in our democracy and will increase voter turnout. Fifteen other states enacted same-day registration, and those states saw a 10 percent increase in voter turnout. Most people who are turned away from voting are young people who are not familiar with voting and the process, and they become disappointed to find out that they cannot vote because of the deadlines currently in place. Voting is the most vital pillar in our democracy, and same-day voting is a supplemental tool to increase voter access. Voting is habit forming, and voters get others in their community to vote. The more people who vote, the more representation there is.

Same-day voting does not open the door to more voting fraud, and voter fraud under the current system is miniscule as it is. When voting fraud was found, it was cases where people who lived on a border and owned property in multiple states mistakenly thought they were allowed to vote twice. Provisional ballots can be used to safeguard security if the modern elections management system is not in place in time to implement the new registration deadlines. The system will be in place by 2019. However, Wisconsin was able to implement same-day voting in 1976, so Washington should have this technology available in 2018.

(Opposed) Citizen confidence in election systems comes from a balance of security and access. Election administrators need to build confidence that voters are not going to cast multiple ballots in different counties. The new modern election management system will help to ensure that every person who participates in the election only participates once. The intent of the bill is good, but the concern is with the June 30, 2019, deadline. The deadline will force counties to implement the bill before the technology is in place to make it work. The new system will provide almost real time communication between the counties. If the new system is not in place, election administrators will need to build in the controls manually statewide, which will take us back to poll site voting, where you process the poll site ballots first and hold the absentee ballots to make sure people did not cast more than one ballot counted. This will slow ballot counting and release of election results. The new system will be up in late 2019, and the implementation date should be changed to December of 2019.

(Other) There are concerns about the implementation date and the cost of implementation. Moving the registration deadlines would be easier with even-year funding.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Kuderer, prime sponsor; Salvador Salazar Cano, Associated Students of the University of Washington Bothell and Washington Student Association; James Paribello, Washington Voting Justice Coalition; Kathy Sakahara, League of Women Voters of Washington; Cindy Black, Fix Democracy First; Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor's Office; and Arne Nelson, Washington Student Association.

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

(Other) Michael Shaw, Washington Association of County Officials.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.