

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5473

As of February 13, 2017

Title: An act relating to authorizing counties to establish and conduct polling place voting.

Brief Description: Authorizing counties to establish and conduct polling place voting.

Sponsors: Senators Pearson and Hasegawa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government: 2/08/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes counties to establish polling place voting in all or part of the county by resolution or initiated by voter petitions.
- Provides technical procedures for the conduct of polling place voting in counties where it is adopted.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: Washington, along with Oregon and Colorado, conducts all elections by mail.

As early as 1915, a voter was allowed to cast an absentee ballot if the voter was not able to be present to vote at the polls on election day. In 1933, voters with disabilities and voters over the age of 65 were authorized to vote via absentee ballot. In 1967, a county auditor could designate a mail ballot precinct if the precinct had less than 100 registered voters. By 1974, the Legislature expanded absentee voting to all voters who made a request, and by 1993 those voters could requested to vote absentee on an ongoing basis. In 2005, county auditors were allowed to conduct all elections entirely by mail ballot with the approval of the county legislative authority.

In 2011, when Washington required counties to conduct all elections entirely by mail, only Pierce County still allowed for polling place voting.

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: Polling Place Voting Authorized. Counties may, by ordinance, establish polling place voting in all or part of the county. Polling place voting may also be proposed by petitions signed by a number of voters totaling at least eight percent of the votes cast in the county at the last gubernatorial election. If a sufficient number of signatures are submitted, the county legislative authority must conduct a public hearing on the matter and may adopt polling place voting in the county.

Polling Place Voting Procedures. Procedures are set forth for counties adopting polling place voting in all or part of their jurisdiction. Polling places must be kept open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on election day. Any qualified voter in line at 8 p.m. must be allowed to vote. Polling places must be accessible to elderly and disabled persons, and located inside or within a reasonable distance of the boundaries of election precincts. A voter may indicate that they will vote at a polling place, and if so, will not be issued a mail ballot. A voter who has requested a mail ballot, but who chooses to vote at a polling place, will be issued a provisional ballot.

Voters at polling places must provide identification. Valid forms include driver's licenses and identicards, student, voter, and tribal identification cards, and copies of current utility bills, bank statements, paychecks, or other government documents. Voters unable to provide valid identification are issued provisional ballots.

Technical procedures for the preparation of ballots, provisional ballots, and voting equipment are also set forth.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Many constituents request greater options for voting in elections besides mail-in ballots. This bill would create greater community involvement and increase the number of people who are involved in the voting process.

CON: Auditors oppose in-person voting due to the fiscal impact to local precincts and counties. This bill would create inconsistency in voting throughout the state. Local precincts no longer have the equipment necessary to facilitate polling place voting. The costs associated with in-person voting would create an unfair burden on local governments.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Kirk Pearson, Prime Sponsor.

CON: Monty Cobb, Washington Association of County Officials.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.