

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1209

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Title: An act relating to prepaid postage for all election ballots.

Brief Description: Providing prepaid postage for all election ballots.

Sponsors: Representatives Hansen, Jinkins, Tarleton, Rude, Valdez, Dolan, Ortiz-Self, Kilduff, Thai, Frame, Slatter, Bergquist, Leavitt, Macri, Tharinger, Goodman, Riccelli and Stanford; by request of Governor Inslee.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/1/19, 2/8/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires prepaid postage to be included on all ballot return envelopes for all elections.
- Requires the state to reimburse counties in all elections for the cost of return postage.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Gregerson, Chair; Pellicciotti, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Goehner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Dolan, Hudgins, Mosbrucker and Smith.

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

State Share of Election Costs.

The state must pay a prorated share of the cost of any primary or general election in odd-numbered years when state officers or measures are on the ballot. The state must also pay a prorated share of costs associated with elections held to fill a vacancy in the United States

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.

Senate or House of Representatives. In addition, the state is required to pay the costs of mandatory recounts for statewide measures.

Elections Materials.

The county auditor must send each voter a ballot, security envelop in which to conceal the ballot after voting, a large envelope in which to return the security envelope, a declaration that the voter must sign, and instructions on how to obtain information about the election, how to mark the ballot, and how to return the ballot to the county auditor.

A person may return a ballot by various ways, one of which includes by mail at his or her own expense.

Summary of Bill:

The return envelope for all elections must include prepaid postage. The state must reimburse counties in all elections for the cost of including return postage on mailed ballots.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 2019.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Voting should be easy and free. Prepaid postage was made available last year within existing resources, so the state should be able to do that again. Prepaid postage increases voter participation. When the state offered prepaid postage, nearly 72 percent of registered voters participated in the general election. Prior to prepaid postage, 60 percent of ballots were being returned via drop boxes. With prepaid postage, that was inverted and 60 percent of voters returned their ballot using the United States Postal Service. It is important to have both the drop box and prepaid postage. Drop boxes are important for last minute voters.

In addition, prepaid postage ensures fair access and equal treatment among voters across the state. With the increase in the cost of postage, and the fact that many people cannot make it to a drop box, prepaid postage will eliminate financial and other barriers to voting. This will result in better representation. Furthermore, since the state offered prepaid postage in the last election cycle, not offering it in the future could cause confusion among the voters. Voters have embraced prepaid postage enthusiastically, and they do not plan to return their ballots with a first class stamp, so counties will end up incurring the cost anyway. Prior to using prepaid postage, King County tested the cancelation process, and they had zero problems getting cancelation, or postmark, stamps on prepaid mail.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) There is a concern that business reply mail is not postmarked. It is essential that returned ballots are postmarked in order to determine whether the ballots are returned on time. The Office of the Secretary of State does not postmark envelopes, and there is a concern that the post office does not either.

Persons Testifying: (In support) RaShelle Davis, Office of the Governor; Jay Jennings, Office of the Secretary of State; Mike Hoover, Washington State Association of Counties; Cindy Black, Fix Democracy First; Alex Hur, Washington Voting Justice Coalition; Henry Pollet, Associated Students of Western Washington University; and Julie Anderson, Washington State Association of County Auditors.

(Other) Rebecca Faust.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.