

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1291

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

Title: An act relating to state reimbursement of election costs.

Brief Description: Concerning state reimbursement of election costs.

Sponsors: Representatives Walsh, Dolan, Goehner, Gregerson, Van Werven, Eslick, Bergquist, Pollet and Rude.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/25/19, 2/1/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the state to reimburse the prorated share of state elections costs to counties for primary and general elections in even-numbered years.
- Requires the state to reimburse the prorated share of federal elections costs to counties for all primary and general elections.
- Requires the state to reimburse the costs of mandatory recounts for certain offices.

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 Omlie (786-7105).

Background:

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

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prorated share of costs associated with elections held to fill a vacancy in the United States Senate or the House of Representatives.

The county auditor apportions the state's share of election costs and files for reimbursement with the Secretary of State (Secretary). The Secretary must include in the biennial budget sufficient funds to cover the prorated share of election costs, and appropriations must be made specifically for reimbursement for election costs. The Secretary is required to pay interest for any period of time in excess of 30 days after the receipt of a reimbursement voucher and entry of an allotment from specifically appropriated funds.

For recounts, the canvassing board determines the cost of conducting a recount of votes. The cost of a recount is deducted from the amount deposited by the applicant for the recount, except when the recount changes the result of the nomination or election for which the recount was ordered. The cost for a mandatory recount cannot be charged to any candidate. The state is required to pay the costs of mandatory recounts for statewide measures.

Summary of Bill:

The state must reimburse counties for the prorated share of:

- state elections costs for primary and general elections held in even-numbered years; and
- federal elections costs for all primary and general elections.

The provision requiring that the state pay interest is removed. Rather, the state is required to pay reimbursement costs within 30 days after the receipt of a properly executed and documented voucher for reimbursement, until the funds appropriated for reimbursement are exhausted. If the funds appropriated for reimbursement are insufficient, the Secretary must include a budget request to the Legislature during the next legislative session for reimbursement of all remaining claims. The Secretary must reimburse the county within 30 days of allotment of specifically appropriated funds.

For recounts, the process for deducting the cost of a recount from amounts deposited by the applicant for the recount is clarified to apply to permissive recounts only. For mandatory recounts, the county auditor must file an expense claim with the Secretary for the following offices:

- an office where the candidates filed the declaration of candidacy with the Secretary;
- any legislative office; and
- any congressional office.

For the mandatory recounts, the Secretary must include a budget request to the Legislature during the next legislative session for sufficient funds to reimburse all the costs of the recounts. The Secretary must reimburse the costs within 30 days of allotment of specifically appropriated funds.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2020.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The policy in this bill is a small attempt to fund unfunded mandates. The state does not pay its share during the years when the state is consuming the largest share of election resources. Small counties have less staff and resources and are stretched thin as it is. If problems arise, the smaller counties have difficulty addressing the problems. Smaller counties do not even have money in the budget for voter outreach or voter pamphlets. Last year, the cost of elections for Mason County was \$154,000 and taxpayers paid \$143,000. The state's share was \$74,000, but the county picked up that cost. In Thurston County, the 2016 presidential election cost \$1.2 million. The county's share was \$173,000 and state share was \$705,000, which is what the county paid. That money could be spent on other resources, such as additional staff. With the continued lack of funding and increased duties in small counties without a large tax base additional risks will be introduced. The way elections are paid now creates a variation in county budgets and makes it hard for counties to plan budgets; continuity in revenue is needed for stability.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Walsh, prime sponsor; Paddy McGuire, Mason County Auditor's Office; Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor's Office; Julie Anderson, Washington State Association of County Auditors; Jay Jennings, Office of the Secretary of State; and Mike Hoover, Washington State Association of Counties.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.