

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## ESHB 2421

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### As Passed Legislature

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

**Brief Description:** Concerning state reimbursement of election costs.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Tarleton, Pollet and Doglio).

#### **Brief History:**

##### **Committee Activity:**

Appropriations: 1/29/20, 2/8/20 [DPS].

##### **Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 2/13/20, 80-16.

Senate Amended.

Passed Senate: 3/4/20, 42-2.

House Refused to Concur.

Senate Insists on its Position.

House Concurred.

Passed House: 3/10/20, 96-1.

Passed Legislature.

#### **Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill**

- Requires the state to reimburse the counties for its proportionate share of state election costs in even-numbered years.
- Requires county auditors to produce local voters' pamphlets for primary, general, and special elections.
- Requires the state to pay for mandatory recounts for any legislative or congressional office.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 31 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Robinson, 1st Vice Chair; Bergquist, 2nd Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant

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Ranking Minority Member; Rude, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Caldier, Chandler, Chopp, Cody, Dolan, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Hansen, Hoff, Hudgins, Kilduff, Kraft, Macri, Mosbrucker, Pettigrew, Pollet, Ryu, Schmick, Senn, Steele, Sullivan, Sutherland, Tarleton, Tharinger and Ybarra.

**Staff:** Linda Merelle (786-7092).

**Background:**

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

*Prepaid Postage.*

Effective July 1, 2019, return envelopes for ballots must include prepaid postage, and the state must reimburse counties for the cost of placing prepaid postage on mail and absentee ballots in primary and general elections.

*Interest on Reimbursements.*

The Office of the Secretary of State (Secretary of State) must pay 2 percent annual interest on county reimbursement amounts paid after 30 days of the receipt of a properly executed voucher from a county for the reimbursement of election costs.

Election Recounts.

An officer of a political party or a candidate may request a recount of the votes or a portion of the votes cast at the election for all candidates for election to that office. The cost of the recount is borne by the applicant.

A recount is mandatory in a primary or an election if the difference in the number of votes between the winning and losing candidates is less than 2,000 votes and also less than 0.5 percent of the total number of votes cast for both candidates. Smaller vote margins between candidates may require a manual recount.

Voters' Pamphlet.

At least 90 days before a primary or general election or at least 40 days before a special election, the legislative authority of any county or first-class or code city may adopt an ordinance authorizing the publication and distribution of a local voters' pamphlet. The pamphlet must include information on all measures within that jurisdiction and, if specified in the ordinance, may include information on candidates within that jurisdiction.

**Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:**

Proportionate Election Costs in Even and Odd Years.

The state, counties, cities, towns, and districts are liable for their proportionate share of election costs when any primary, general, or special election is held. State and federal offices

are considered to be one entity for the purposes of determining proportionate election costs and reimbursements.

Counties are not responsible for any costs for an election in any city, town, or district. Counties are also not responsible for the costs for any state or federal election. The county auditor must apportion among the state, the county, and each city, town, or district, the expense of the primaries and elections, including materials and supplies.

The state's share of the proportionate expenses for federal officers, state officers, or measures voted upon at a state primary or general election are determined in accordance with the state budgeting, accounting, and reporting system. The determination of the state's proportion may be determined based upon: (1) a formulation that includes both the number of registered voters in a jurisdiction and the number of officers and issues in that jurisdiction; or (2) a formulation based only upon the number of registered voters in a jurisdiction.

*Prepaid Postage.*

The cost of prepaid postage is apportioned among the state, the counties, and each city, town, or district.

Reimbursements.

Upon receipt of a properly submitted voucher from the county auditor, the Secretary of State must pay, within 30 days, from specifically appropriated funds until those funds are exhausted. If the appropriated funds are insufficient to cover the voucher, the Secretary of State must seek sufficient additional funds from the Legislature during the next legislative session. The state is not required to pay interest on reimbursement amounts.

Recounts.

The state must pay for mandatory recounts for any legislative or congressional office as part of the reimbursement for election costs to counties. The Secretary of State must include a budget request to the Legislature during the next legislative session for funds for reimbursement of all costs for the mandatory recount and must reimburse those costs to counties in the same manner as other election cost reimbursements.

Local Voters' Pamphlet.

Before primary, general, or special elections, each county auditor must print and distribute a local voters' pamphlet. The pamphlet must provide information on all measures and candidates within that jurisdiction.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on July 1, 2021.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) This is a bill about good government and equitable distribution. The prepaid postage will no longer be entirely the state's burden. The state should be paying a pro rata

share of the elections regardless when they happen. Cemetery districts, fire districts, and other districts must pay election costs. The state should also pay. This is a necessary step in securing equitable elections. Without the state paying its fair share, budgets can be unpredictable and inaccurate. Under the provisions of this bill, all voters would receive information about ballot measures and candidates in their jurisdiction. Needed funds are provided for voter education and outreach.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor's Office; Joesph MacLean, Grays Harbor County Auditor's Office; Daryl Daug, Kitsap County Auditor's Office; Nancy Sapiro, League of Women Voters of Washington; and Mike Hoover, Washington State Association of Counties.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.