

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 6313

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

Title: An act relating to increasing opportunities for young voters.

Brief Description: Increasing opportunities for young voters.

Sponsors: Senators Liias, Kuderer, Hunt, Randall, Mullet, Keiser, Billig, Saldaña, Darneille, Hasegawa, Takko, Rolfes, McCoy, Stanford, Das, Dhingra, Lovelett, Nguyen and Wilson, C.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/20/20, 2/21/20 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill
(As Amended by Committee)**

- Permits 17 year olds who will be 18 years old at the next general election to vote in primary elections.
- Requires the Department of Licensing to allow 16 and 17 year olds to sign up to register to vote by automated process when receiving or renewing an enhanced driver's license or identicaid.
- Requires Student Engagement Hubs to be established on college campuses.
- Provides that the Superintendent of Public Instruction and other entities must make civics resources and materials available for high school civics courses.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Gregerson, Chair; Pellicciotti, Vice Chair; Appleton, Dolan and Hudgins.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Goehner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Mosbrucker and Smith.

Staff: Carrington Skinner (786-7192).

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.

Background:

Voter Qualifications and Registration.

A person is eligible to vote if the person is a United States citizen, has lived at their address in Washington for at least 30 days prior to the election, is at least 18 years old, is not under Department of Corrections supervision for a felony conviction, and is not disqualified to vote due to a court order. A 16 or 17 year old may sign up electronically or by mail to register to vote as part of the Future Voter Program. A future voter may not vote until reaching 18 years of age.

The Secretary of State must maintain a statewide voter registration database that serves as the official list of registered voters for all elections. A future voter may not be added to the voter registration database until the time the person will be 18 by the next election; until that time the registration is classified as "pending."

The Department of Licensing must implement an automatic voter registration system that permits a person who is at least 18 years old who meets registration requirements and has received or is renewing an enhanced driver's license or identicard, or is changing their address, to register to vote or update their registration by automated process. Other state agencies and programs also offer voter registration services. Institutions of higher education must include a link to the Secretary of State's voter registration website on their course registration website or similar website.

Elections.

General elections are held on the first Tuesday after the first Monday each November. Primaries for general elections, which are held to winnow candidates for public office to a list of two, are held on the first Tuesday of August preceding the November general election. Presidential primaries are held on the second Tuesday in March of each presidential election year. Special elections may be held in conjunction with a general election or primary or on a different designated date.

County auditors are required to open a voting center during business hours in the period beginning 18 days before and ending at 8:00 p.m. on the day of each primary, special, and general election. At each voting center, voter registration materials, ballots, provisional ballots, disability access voting units, sample ballots, ballot instructions, a ballot drop box, and voters' pamphlets must be made available.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Voting Eligibility and Registration.

A person may vote in a primary election or presidential primary election if that person will be 18 years old by the next general election. However, a person still may not vote in a special or general election until the person's eighteenth birthday. Conforming changes are made to voter registration requirements, the registration oath, and other related registration and election provisions.

The Department of Licensing must allow persons aged 16 or 17 to be signed up to register to vote by automated process as part of receiving or updating an address for an enhanced driver's license or identicard, so long as other requirements for registration are met and a signature of the voter is provided. A future voter is considered to be registered to vote when the person will be at least 17 years old by the next primary or presidential primary and 18 years old by the general election.

Student Engagement Hubs and Education Materials.

Each state university, regional university, higher education campus, and The Evergreen State College must open a student engagement hub on campus. The hub may be open during business hours beginning eight days before and ending at 8:00 p.m. on the day of a general election. All hubs must allow students to download their exact ballot from an online portal. Upon request of the student government organization at a state or regional university or The Evergreen State College, the hub must allow voters to register to vote in person and provide voter registration materials and ballots.

Institutions must contract with the county auditor for the operation of student engagement hubs, and, subject to appropriations, the Secretary of State may provide grants to county auditors to operate the hubs. A list of student engagement hubs must be included in statewide and local voters' pamphlets.

By September 1, 2020, civics materials and resources for high school stand-alone civics courses must be identified and made available by the Superintendent of Public Instruction in collaboration with the Washington State Association of County Auditors and a nonprofit organization engaged in voter outreach and increasing voter participation.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Bill:

The striking amendment requires student engagement hubs to allow students to download ballots from an online portal, rather than provide replacement ballots. It also requires certain student engagement hubs, upon request of student government organizations, to provide ballots in addition to voter registration materials. The striking amendment also clarifies that student engagement hubs are not voting centers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 21, 2020.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill contains multiple effective dates.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill will help get more high school students involved and engaged. The bill creates a comprehensive plan to increase youth voter participation. There have been strides in increasing youth voter participation due to changes in the law in recent years, but more improvements can be made. People who participate in the process at an early age are more

likely to participate in the future. The student engagement hubs will allow more people to participate and become educated about the political process. A student engagement center at Central Washington University has helped provide election information for students and this bill will expand that concept to other campuses. Democracy will function best when more young people participate. If a person is old enough to vote in the general election, that person should have a say in the primary process. Seventeen states already allow 17 year olds to vote in primaries.

(Opposed) The Secretary of State wants to get students and young people engaged, as there are currently 26,000 preregistrants as part of the Future Voter Program. However, there are strong concerns about the constitutionality of the legislation and the potential for legal challenges, as well as issues regarding transparency and funding.

(Other) The Washington State Association of Counties supports the aim of the bill, there are concerns about logistics and funding. It is important to keep track of all the election changes that are currently being made in legislation to ensure everything is adequately funded.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Liias, prime sponsor; Representative Bergquist; Zackary Turner, Washington Student Association at Washington State University; Nancy Canales Montiel, Associated Students of Central Washington University; Danny Villars and Libby Watson, The Washington Bus; Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor's Office; Paul Francis, Council of Presidents; Maggie Yuse, University of Washington; and Matthew Sutherland, Graduate and Professional Student Association at Washington State University.

(Opposed) Jay Jennings, Office of the Secretary of State.

(Other) Mike Hoover, Washington State Association of Counties.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.