

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5017

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
State Government & Tribal Affairs

**Title:** An act relating to inactive voters.

**Brief Description:** Eliminating the requirement that auditors send a ballot or an application to receive a ballot to inactive voters.

**Sponsors:** Senators McDermott, Parlette, Fairley, Oemig, Hatfield, Shin, Honeyford and Haugen.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 3/19/09, 3/20/09 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Eliminates the requirement that a county auditor send inactive voters a ballot or ballot application at least 18 days prior to an election.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Flannigan, Hurst and Miloscia.

**Staff:** Tracey O'Brien (786-7196)

**Background:**

A county auditor is required to assign a registered voter to inactive status and send a confirmation notice if certain documents are returned by the postal service as undeliverable: an acknowledgment of registration; an acknowledgment of transfer to new address; a vote-by-mail ballot, absentee ballot or application for a ballot; notification to a voter after a precinct reassignment; notification to serve on jury duty; or any other required document, other than a confirmation notice, mailed by the county auditor to the voter. In addition, the county auditor is required to assign a registered voter to inactive status and send a

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confirmation notice whenever a change of address information from the Department of Licensing, or other agency designated to provide voter registration services, indicates the voter has moved to an address out of state or the auditor receives a postal change of address information indicating the voter has moved out of state.

An inactive voter must be returned to active status if, during the period beginning on the date the voter was assigned to inactive status and ending on the day of the second general election for federal office that occurs after the date that the voter was sent a confirmation notice, the voter: notifies the auditor of a change of address within the county; responds to a confirmation notice with the information that the voter continues to reside at the registration address; votes or attempts to vote in a primary or general election and resides in the county; or signs any petition authorized by statute for which the signatures are required by law to be verified by the county auditor or Secretary of State (SOS). If the inactive voter fails to provide notice or take action within that period, the county auditor must cancel the person's voter registration.

According to the SOS's Monthly Voter Registration Report, as of November 3, 2008, there were 3,626,773 active registered voters in Washington. In 2008 the SOS canceled 82,950 voter registrations due to voter inactivity in two federal elections, voter request, or notification that the voter moved out of state.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The county auditor is not required to send each inactive voter either a ballot or an application to receive a ballot at least 18 days prior to a primary, general, or special election.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) The public is asking for more efficient government and this bill will eliminate a costly and redundant requirement in the elections process. An inactive voter is a person that is registered to vote who may have moved and does not respond to notices from the county auditor. An inactive voter remains on inactive status through two federal general elections before his or her registration will be cancelled. However, an inactive voter may reactivate at any time by calling, electronic mailing, or submitting a voter registration application to the county auditor. An updated address is all that is needed. Under this bill, the auditors will continue to send notices to the inactive voter, but will not send a ballot or a ballot application 18 days prior to an election.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator McDermott, prime sponsor; Joanie Deutsch, Office of the Secretary of State; and Evelyn Arnold, Chelan County Auditor.

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