

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SHB 1572

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
Government Operations & Elections, March 24, 2009

**Title:** An act relating to all mail elections.

**Brief Description:** Adopting all mail voting.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on State Government & Tribal Affairs (originally sponsored by Representatives Hunt, Liias, Appleton, Miloscia and Williams).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 3/09/09, 54-43.

**Committee Activity:** Government Operations & Elections: 3/24/09 [DP, DNP].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; McDermott, Pridemore and Swecker.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Oemig, Vice Chair.

**Staff:** Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

**Background:** As early as 1915 a voter was allowed to cast an absentee ballot if that voter was not able to be present to vote at the polls on election day. In 1933 voters with disabilities and voters over the age of 65 were authorized to vote an absentee ballot. By 1967 a county auditor could designate a mail ballot precinct if the precinct had less than 100 registered voters. By 1974 the Legislature expanded absentee voting to all voters who made a request, and by 1993 those voters could request to vote absentee on an on-going basis. In 2005 county auditors were allowed to conduct all elections entirely by mail ballot with the approval of the county legislative authority. Today all counties, except Pierce County, conduct elections entirely by mail.

**Summary of Bill:** Vote by Mail. All counties must conduct all elections entirely by mail ballot. County auditors must notify each registered voter not receiving an absentee ballot on a regular basis that all future elections will be conducted by mail. The notification must include information on the locations of voting centers.

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*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.*

Definitions. "Ballot drop off site" is defined as a site or sites designated by the county auditor in which a voter may deposit his or her ballot in a secure location device on or before election day.

A "voting center" is defined as a facility of facilities designated by the county auditor that serves as a disability access voting location, issues provisional ballots, and serves as a ballot drop-off site.

Voting Centers. A registered voter may transfer his or her voter registration, execute a name change, or obtain a replacement ballot at a voting center. County auditors must designate at least one location as a voting center for purposes of disability access voting.

Procedural requirements formerly conducted at polling places are required at voting centers, as applicable. Voters must provide identification and sign an oath affirming the voter's qualifications to vote. Requirements for handling ballots and provisional ballots are the same as for poll sites.

The county auditor must appoint three election officials for each voting center. The appointments must be made at least 20 days prior to a primary or election. The appointments of election officials for each voting center are the same as the requirements for appointing inspectors and judges of elections.

Precinct Size. Determinations of precinct size are changed from not more than 900 active registered poll voters to a maximum of 2,000 active registered voters. This provision does not go into effect until 2012.

Publishing Requirements. The requirement for including an application for an absentee ballot in the voters' pamphlet is removed. County auditors must publish notice of an election between 40 and 20 days before the election.

Precinct Committee Officers. A county central committee of a major political party may opt to designate four precinct committee officer positions in any precinct that has at least 2,000 active registered voters, as of the day of the general election in the previous odd-numbered year. The county auditor must designate position numbers for the precinct committee officer positions prior to accepting declarations of candidacy.

Reconciliation Reports. Reconciliation reports prepared by county auditors no longer must include numbers relating to poll voters. A requirement is added to include in the report the total number of ballots received, in addition to the ballots issued, counted, and rejected.

General Provisions and Changes. All references to polls, poll sites voting, poll books, poll lists, precinct polling places, poll site ballot counting devices, absentee voting, precinct election officers, and inspectors and judges of election are removed. Where applicable, references to "polling place" are changed to "election workers," "precinct election officers" are changed to "election officers," and inspectors and judges of election are changed to "election observers."

Re-codified Statutes. Certain statutes relating to absentee voting are re-codified in with statutes relating to vote by mail.

Repealed Statutes. Certain statutes relating to precinct and polling place determination and accessibility; absentee voting; polling place elections, and poll workers; voting by mail; canvassing; casting a vote at a polling site; duties of election officers in securing unused ballots at polling sites; and crimes and penalties are repealed.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed except for sections 1 through 72, 77 through 89, 91 through 94, and 96 through 109 pertaining to poll site voting take effect July 1, 2010; and section 90 and 95 pertaining to processing ballots and canvassing votes after the expiration of the instant runoff voting pilot project take effect July 1, 2013.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Currently, 38 of 39 counties in Washington vote entirely by mail. There are two separate sets of statutes on the books but only for one county. The reality is that the polls are being kept open for a very small number of people; statistically there are single digits of voters who actually go to the polls. In Pierce County the majority of people vote by mail. Creating statewide uniformity with regard to voting will save time, money, and resources. Closing the polls will save Pierce County \$72,000 per county election.

CON: The Pierce County Council objects to this bill. This is a local issue and should be decided by the voters of Pierce County, not the state Legislature. Many people want the option of going to a polling site and voting on election day. Voters get a tangible, positive feeling from "getting out to vote" and the state should not take that away from them.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Representative Hunt, prime sponsor; George Walk, Pierce County Executive; Katie Blinn, Secretary of State.

CON: George Walk, Pierce County Council.