

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2204

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

Title: An act relating to extending the time period for voter registration.

Brief Description: Extending the time period for voter registration.

Sponsors: Representatives Fitzgibbon, Billig, Hudgins, Hunt, Miloscia, Goodman, Hansen, Carlyle, Orwall, Kagi, Pedersen, Ormsby, Reykdal, Appleton, Jinkins, Stanford, Ladenburg, Pollet, Hasegawa, Maxwell, Darneille, Upthegrove and Kenney.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 1/12/12, 1/16/12, 1/23/12 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows a person to participate in an election by registering to vote on election day.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Darneille, Dunshee, McCoy and Miloscia.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Taylor, Ranking Minority Member; Overstreet, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Condotta and Hurst.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

Same day registration laws allow a person to participate in an election as long as he or she registers to vote on the day of that election. Nine states have enacted same day registration laws: Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Washington law requires that in order to participate in any

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election, a person must register by submitting an application no later than 29 days before the day of the election or register in person at the county auditor's office no later than eight days before the election.

Summary of Bill:

Any person not registered to vote may participate in an election if he or she submits an online application no later than eight days before the day of the election, or registers in person at the county auditor's office, or other location designated by the county auditor, no later than 5 p.m. on the day of the election.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 9, 2012.

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) There was a time when it made sense to require a lengthy period between registration and voting, but times and technology have changed. States that have enacted same day registration have a bigger voter turnout. Many people find that it is too late to register to vote for an upcoming election. It is time to take this step.

This year, roughly 500 student voters were registered before the cut-off. It is difficult to register students in the time allowed because they are registering for classes, attending classes, and moving into dorms. The extra time will take the pressure off students and allow more time to register to vote. Any measure that increases access is appreciated by students. Participation has increased when the period for registration is increased.

Auditors are here to serve the public and should not place impediments to voting. It should be easy to register to vote. In Maine, the public opposed the attempt to move registration to two days before the election. Because students move a lot, we need to encourage, rather than discourage, them to vote. The deadline should be moved to 8 p.m. on election day. Any lines due to last minute registration would encourage people to register early.

Students are transitory and re-registration is a high priority. This is a huge step forward for Washington. Registration deadlines affect students and low income people as these groups do not vote as often as others. Participation drops with household incomes. Efforts must continue to provide access to voter registration to people with low incomes, students, and people of color. Last minute registration works. More people should vote and be part of the democratic process.

(Opposed) Current law assures that every person is able to register to vote. Deadlines are a reasonable balance between access and participation. It allows time to issue ballots and return the ballots. The average voter turnout nationwide in the last presidential election was 69 percent compared to 84 percent in Washington. The success in our state is due to online registration and early voting. Increasing the registration period will result in long lines and a longer time for election results. The process to register a person to vote, make the required checks, and add the information to the database will take 15 minutes per registrant. When eight-day registration was enacted, it was agreed to build toward same day registration. The eight-day registration will not be tested until the presidential election this coming year. In 2008, in Thurston County, over 1,000 people came into the office and registered to vote. In King County, it was 10 times that number. It will put a huge strain on the voter registration database. If it crashes on election day, it will not allow anyone to vote.

Washington supports and encourages young people to register to vote. A study was conducted about whether same day registration improves turnout and the results were questionable. Washington is a leader in election practices.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Fitzgibbon, prime sponsor; William Dow and Lucas Barash-David, Associated Students of the University of Washington; Eric Lint, Associated Students of the University of Washington Tacoma; Steve Zemke, King County Democrats; Toby Crittenden, Washington Bus; Kate Baber, Statewide Poverty Action Network; and Kim Abel, League of Women Voters of Washington.

(Opposed) Julie Anderson and Kim Wyman, Washington State Association of County Auditors; and Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.