

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## ESSB 6180

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

**Title:** An act relating to reducing costs and inefficiencies in elections.

**Brief Description:** Reducing costs and inefficiencies in elections.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Government Operations, Tribal Relations & Elections  
(originally sponsored by Senators Swecker, Nelson and Sheldon; by request of Secretary of State).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Affairs: 2/16/12, 2/20/12 [DP];

Ways & Means: 2/24/12 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill**

- Revises a broad range of statutory provisions relating to the responsibilities of the Secretary of State and county auditors with respect to voter registration materials, tabulating votes, notices sent to voters, maintaining the voter registration database, the form and content of voter's pamphlets, ballot measure requirements, communicating with voters through electronic means, and primary election regulations.
- Eliminates the requirement that the full text of a ballot measure be included in the statewide and local voters pamphlets, effective January 1, 2013.
- Repeals various statutes relating to the form and substance of voter's pamphlets.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Appleton, Vice Chair; Taylor, Ranking Minority Member; Overstreet, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Condotta, Darneille, Dunshee, Hurst, McCoy and Miloscia.

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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.*

**Staff:** Thamas Osborn (786-7129).

**Background:**

The Secretary of State (Secretary) has a wide range of duties to the citizens of this state, perhaps the most important of which are the myriad responsibilities of the office with respect to the facilitation and oversight of the election process. These electoral duties encompass elections for federal, statewide, and local offices, as well as initiatives and referenda submitted for voter approval. The various responsibilities of the Secretary in this regard include, but are not limited to, the following:

- providing citizens with access to state election laws and voter information;
- assisting county auditors (auditors) in the election process;
- maintaining the state voter registration database;
- overseeing the functioning of vote tabulation systems; and
- overseeing the form and content of voter's pamphlets.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The Secretary is required to make the most recent version of state election laws, and the pertinent administrative rules, available on the office website for access by county auditors and the public.

The types of "acknowledgement notices" an auditor is required to send to registered voters is reduced and simplified. Auditors no longer need to send a voter an individualized acknowledgement notice for every voter registration transaction, but the act continues to require that auditors send a voter notice of the disposition of his or her voter registration application.

The act clarifies that Washington voter registration information in the state database can be compared to information from other states to identify duplicate registrations and suspected duplicate voters.

With respect to the vote tallying system testing required at least three days before each state primary or general election, auditors, rather than the Secretary, shall be primarily responsible for conducting the testing of the programming of the vote tallying systems.

Statutory provisions governing the form and content of both state and local voter's pamphlets, and the Secretary's duties with respect to such pamphlets, are revised under the act. These revisions include:

- Effective January 1, 2013, the requirement that the full text of a ballot measure be printed in the statewide and local voter's pamphlets is eliminated.
- The time frame for the approval of the publication and distribution of a local voter's pamphlet by the governing body of a county or city is increased from 40 to 50 days before any special election.

- Fiscal impact statements regarding ballot measures must include directions to voters on how to find additional information regarding fiscal impacts on the website of the Office of Financial Management (OFM).
- The assumptions underlying fiscal impact statements for ballot measures must be posted on the website of the OFM.

No primary may be held for any single position in a local, nonpartisan office if no more than two candidates have filed for the position.

In cases where there is a problem with the signature match between the ballot declaration and the voter registration document, the auditor has the option of notifying the voter either by telephone, electronic mail, or first class mail. In addition, the auditor must advise the voter of the correct procedures for updating his or her signature in the voter registration file.

An auditor is authorized to certify the results of a recount by batch, instead of precinct, if the original count can be reported by batch.

Revisions are made to filing requirements for a proposed ballot measure, initiative, or referendum, so as to allow the sponsor of the measure to certify by electronic submission that he or she is a registered voter.

In the event voters are affected by a change of electoral jurisdiction due to a boundary change, the auditor must:

- update the registration records of every affected voter; and
- make personalized jurisdiction information available to the voters either online or by mail.

Several statutes are repealed:

- RCW 29A.32.031: contents of voter's pamphlets;
- RCW 29A.32.032: candidate's political party preference or independent status to be indicated in voter's pamphlet;
- RCW 29A.32.036: voter's pamphlets for even-year primaries must state that only party affiliated voters may vote in that party's primary;
- RCW 29A.32.080: stylistic requirements in voter's pamphlets for amendatory language for ballot measures amending existing law; and
- RCW 29A.52.011: conditions under which no primary must be held to fill an unexpired term.

Sections 8 and 10 of the act take effect on January 1, 2013. The remaining sections of the act are subject to an emergency clause causing them to take effect immediately upon enactment.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately, except for sections 8 and 10, relating to the elimination of the requirement that the full text of ballot measures be included in printed voters' pamphlets, which take effect on January 1, 2013.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) This bill has a broad range of provisions that will result in greater efficiency in handling election-related matters and will save considerable money. The key cost-saving measure is the elimination of the requirement that the full text of ballot measures be included in voters' pamphlets. Judicial primaries will no longer be required if there are two or fewer candidates. Primaries are expensive and this will save considerable money. Also, the bill authorizes the use of electronic media for a variety of purposes with respect to publishing election-related information and for communicating with registered voters. The bill will save \$1.7 million per biennium.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Julie Anderson, Washington State Association of County Auditors; and Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State.

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

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS**

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 24 members: Representatives Hunter, Chair; Darneille, Vice Chair; Hasegawa, Vice Chair; Alexander, Ranking Minority Member; Bailey, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dammeier, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Carlyle, Cody, Dickerson, Haigh, Haler, Hinkle, Hudgins, Hunt, Kagi, Kenney, Ormsby, Pettigrew, Ross, Schmick, Seaquist, Springer, Sullivan and Wilcox.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Orcutt, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler and Parker.

**Staff:** Wendy Polzin (786-7137).

**Summary of Recommendation of Committee On Ways & Means Compared to Recommendation of Committee On State Government & Tribal Affairs:**

No new changes were recommended.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately, except for sections 8 and 10, relating to the elimination of the requirement that the full text of ballot measures be included in printed voters' pamphlets, which take effect on January 1, 2013.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Most of the savings from this bill comes from the change regarding judicial elections, where if there are only one or two candidates no primary will be held. This lines the judicial elections up with other nonpartisan races. Savings in printing costs is also achieved through not printing the entire text of a ballot measure. A phone number is currently included in election materials so that citizens can request copies of election materials, and will continue to be included if the bill is passed. This bill impacts the Court of Appeals races most of all.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State.

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