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**HOUSE BILL 1342**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2017 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Bergquist, Koster, Gregerson, and Pollet

AN ACT Relating to allowing voted ballots to be returned electronically; amending RCW 29A.40.091 and 29A.04.255; and reenacting and amending RCW 29A.40.110.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 29A.40.110 and 2011 c 349 s 18, 2011 c 348 s 4, and 2011 c 10 s 41 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

(1) The opening and subsequent processing of return envelopes for any primary or election may begin upon receipt. The tabulation of absentee ballots must not commence until after 8:00 p.m. on the day of the primary or election.

(2) All received return envelopes must be placed in secure locations from the time of delivery to the county auditor until their subsequent opening. After opening the return envelopes, the county canvassing board shall place all of the ballots in secure storage until processing. Ballots may be taken from the inner envelopes and all the normal procedural steps may be performed to prepare these ballots for tabulation.

(3) The canvassing board, or its designated representatives, shall examine the postmark on the return envelope and signature on the declaration before processing the ballot. The ballot must either be received no later than 8:00 p.m. on the day of the primary or election, or must be postmarked no later than the day of the primary or election. All personnel assigned to verify signatures must receive training on statewide standards for signature verification. Personnel shall verify that the voter's signature on the ballot declaration is the same as the signature of that voter in the registration files of the county. Verification may be conducted by an automated verification system approved by the secretary of state. A variation between the signature of the voter on the ballot declaration and the signature of that voter in the registration files due to the substitution of initials or the use of common nicknames is permitted so long as the surname and handwriting are clearly the same.

(4) If the postmark is missing or illegible, the date on the ballot declaration to which the voter has attested determines the validity, as to the time of voting, for that ballot. For ((~~overseas voters and service voters~~)) ballots returned electronically, the date on the declaration to which the voter has attested determines the validity, as to the time of voting, for that ballot. Any ((~~overseas voter or service~~)) voter may return the signed declaration and voted ballot ((~~by fax or email~~)) electronically by 8:00 p.m. on the day of the primary or election, and the county auditor must use established procedures to maintain the secrecy of the ballot.

(5) For a ballot returned electronically, the electronically transmitted image of the voter's signature on the ballot declaration is sufficient to accept the ballot for tabulation. The return of an original or hard copy of the ballot or declaration is not required.

**Sec.**  RCW 29A.40.091 and 2016 c 83 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The county auditor shall send each voter a ballot, a security envelope in which to conceal the ballot after voting, a larger envelope in which to return the security envelope, a declaration that the voter must sign, and instructions on how to obtain information about the election, how to mark the ballot, and how to return the ballot to the county auditor.

(2) The voter must swear under penalty of perjury that he or she meets the qualifications to vote, and has not voted in any other jurisdiction at this election. The declaration must clearly inform the voter that it is illegal to vote if he or she is not a United States citizen; it is illegal to vote if he or she has been convicted of a felony and has not had his or her voting rights restored; and it is illegal to cast a ballot or sign a ballot declaration on behalf of another voter. The ballot materials must provide space for the voter to sign the declaration, indicate the date on which the ballot was voted, and include a telephone number.

(3) For overseas and service voters, the signed declaration constitutes the equivalent of a voter registration. Return envelopes for overseas and service voters must enable the ballot to be returned postage free if mailed through the United States postal service, United States armed forces postal service, or the postal service of a United States foreign embassy under 39 U.S.C. 3406.

(4) The voter must be instructed to either return the ballot to the county auditor no later than 8:00 p.m. the day of the election or primary, or mail the ballot to the county auditor with a postmark no later than the day of the election or primary. ((~~Service and overseas~~)) All voters must be provided with instructions and a privacy sheet for the option of returning the ballot and signed declaration ((~~by fax or email~~)) electronically. A voted ballot and signed declaration returned ((~~by fax or email~~)) electronically must be received by 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election or primary.

(5) The county auditor's name may not appear on the security envelope, the return envelope, or on any voting instructions or materials included with the ballot if he or she is a candidate for office during the same year.

**Sec.**  RCW 29A.04.255 and 2011 c 349 s 1, 2011 c 348 s 1, and 2011 c 10 s 9 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

The secretary of state or a county auditor shall accept and file in his or her office electronic transmissions of the following documents:

(1) Declarations of candidacy;

(2) County canvass reports;

(3) Voters' pamphlet statements;

(4) Arguments for and against ballot measures that will appear in a voters' pamphlet;

(5) Requests for recounts;

(6) Certification of candidates and measures by the secretary of state;

(7) Direction by the secretary of state for the conduct of a recount;

(8) Requests for ballots;

(9) Voted ballots and declarations; and

(10) Any other election related document authorized by rule adopted by the secretary of state under RCW 29A.04.611.

The acceptance by the secretary of state or the county auditor is conditional upon the document being filed in a timely manner, being legible, and otherwise satisfying the requirements of state law or rules with respect to form and content.

The secretary may by rule require that the original of any document, a copy of which is filed by electronic transmission under this section, also be filed by a deadline established by the secretary by rule.

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