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**HOUSE BILL 1003**

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**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2021 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Klippert, Young, Graham, and Sutherland

AN ACT Relating to requiring watermarks on mail-in ballots; amending RCW 29A.40.180; reenacting and amending RCW 29A.40.110; and adding a new section to chapter 29A.36 RCW.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 29A.36 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The secretary of state shall design a watermark for inclusion on official ballots in any election subject to this title. The watermark must be sufficient to prove that the ballot is an official ballot and not a reproduction.

(2) Each ballot printed by a county auditor must include the watermark designed under this section.

(3) This section does not preclude a county auditor from printing a replacement ballot when requested by a voter under this title. Replacement ballots must be identical in form to all original official ballots, including a watermark.

**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, 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 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) After the ballot is separated from the return envelope, the canvassing board, or its designated representatives, shall examine the ballot to ensure that it has the watermark required under section 1 of this act. Ballots that do not have the watermark may not be processed and may not be counted.

**Sec.**  RCW 29A.40.180 and 2020 c 208 s 10 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Each state university, regional university, and The Evergreen State College as defined in RCW 28B.10.016 and each higher education campus as defined in RCW 28B.45.012 shall open a nonpartisan student engagement hub on its campus. The student engagement hub may be open during business hours beginning eight days before, and ending at 8:00 p.m. on the day of, the general election. ((~~All student engagement hubs must allow students to download their exact ballot from an online portal.~~)) Upon request of the student government organization to the administration and the county auditor, the student engagement hub at a state university, regional university, or The Evergreen State College as defined in RCW 28B.10.016 must allow voters to register in person pursuant to RCW 29A.08.140(1)(b) and provide voter registration materials and ballots.

(2) Each institution shall contract with the county auditor for the operation of a student engagement hub under this section.

(3) Student engagement hubs are not voting centers as outlined in RCW 29A.40.160 and must be operated in a manner that avoids partisan influence or electioneering.

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