SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5255

As of January 27, 1995

Title: An act relating to processing of incoming absentee ballots.

Brief Description: Expediting processing of absentee ballots.

Sponsors: Senators Franklin, Winsley, Hale, Sheldon and Oke; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief History:
  Committee Activity: Government Operations: 2/2/95.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Staff: Rod McAulay (786-7754)

Background: When voting by absentee ballot, a voter is provided with a ballot, a security envelope in which to place the ballot, and a larger return envelope in which to place the security envelope. On the face of the return envelope is a space for the voter to enter the date and his or her signature. By signing the return envelope, the voter attests to his or her qualifications and the validity of the ballot.

Current law provides that absentee ballots may be opened and processed on or after the 10th day prior to any primary or election. Tabulation of absentee ballot shall not commence until after 8:00 p.m. on the day of the primary or election. It is not specified what is meant by "processing" during the ten days preceding a primary or election.

After opening the return envelopes, the county canvassing board must place all ballot envelopes in containers that can be secured with numbered seals. The sealed containers must be stored in a secure location until after 8:00 p.m. of the day of the primary or election. If ballots are to be tabulated on an electronic vote tallying system, they may be removed from the inner security envelope and prepared for counting prior to being placed in sealed containers.

Summary of Bill: During the ten days preceding a primary or election, the processing of absentee ballots may include verification of voters' signatures on the return envelopes and opening the return envelopes. The canvassing board must place both ballots and envelopes in sealed containers. The requirement that sealed containers be stored in a secured location is modified by deleting the requirement that storage continue until 8:00 p.m. of the day of the primary or election. Tabulation is defined as any process of counting ballots and reporting election returns in any manner. The process of tabulating absentee ballots by an electronic vote tallying system may begin at noon on the day of the primary or election so long as the process of feeding the ballots into the tallying equipment does not produce election returns in any manner before 8:00 p.m.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.