

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Olympia Washington

BilAnalysis

Bill No. HB 1621

Expediting absentee ballot processing
Brief title

Public Arg: 2/11/97

Reps. D. Schmidt / Scot (Req. Sec. of State)
Sponsor

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BACKGROUND:

The processing of absentee ballots may commence 10 days prior to the date of the election or primary for which they are issued.

If the ballots will be tabulated without using electronic tallying machines, the inner security envelopes remain sealed and are placed in containers secured with numbered seals. The remaining processing and tabulating occurs after the close of the polls on the day of the election or primary.

If the ballots will be tabulated using electronic tallying machines, the inner security envelope may be opened, the ballots removed, and all the normal procedural steps may be performed before the ballots are replaced in containers secured with numbered seals. Ballots are removed from these sealed containers and tabulated after the close of the polls on the day of the election or primary.

The processing and canvassing of ballots in mailed ballot elections follows absentee ballot procedures. However, the ballots may be tabulated on the day of the election prior to the close of the polls, but results may not be revealed to any unauthorized person until the close of the polls.

SUMMARY:

The processing of absentee ballots is clarified and altered.

It is clarified that absentee ballots that will be tabulated with electronic tallying machines may be initially processed 10 or fewer days prior to the primary or election. Initial processing includes (1) verifying signatures on return envelopes; (2) removing the ballots from security envelopes; (3) manually inspecting for damage, write-in votes and incorrect marks; (4) duplicating damaged and write-in ballots; and (5) other preparation of ballots for final processing.

Continued

Each container used to store absentee ballots must be sealed with numbered seals and a record kept of these seal number and date the container was sealed.

If electronic tallying machines will be used to tabulate votes, sealed containers may be opened and the final processing of the ballots may begin at 7:00 a.m. on the day of the primary election. Final processing is defined as the reading of the ballots by an electronic tallying system, but does not include tabulation. No results of tabulating may be produced or distributed after 6:00 p.m. on the day of the primary election. Tabulating is defined as producing returns of votes that are cast. All tabulating of the electronic tallying systems shall be done under continuous observation of representatives of the major political parties and all other security provisions required by the secretary of state.

Before the initial processing of absentee ballots, the county auditor shall notify the county chair of each major political party of the time and date on which absentee ballot processing will begin and request that officials be appointed.

The secretary of state shall adopt procedures for the initial and final processing of absentee ballots. Copies of these rules must be made available to political party observers and must be made available to the general public upon request.

FISCAL NOTE: Not requested.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bills passed.