

FINAL BILL REPORT

SHB 1291

C 298 L 99

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Making various changes in election laws.

Sponsors: By House Committee on State Government (Originally sponsored by Representatives D. Schmidt, McMorris, Romero, Scott, Wensman, Esser, Miloscia, Benson, D. Sommers and Dunn).

House Committee on State Government
Senate Committee on State & Local Government

Background:

State statutes detail elections provisions.

- Voting precincts. Voting precincts created by a county auditor are numbered consecutively.
- Crimes relating to use of voter registration data. It is a felony to use registered voter data for commercial advertising or solicitation punishable by imprisonment for no more than five years, a fine of no more than \$5,000, or both.
- Dates school directors assume office. It is not clear when newly elected school directors assume office. Legislation enacted in 1979 provides that all local government elected officials take office commencing immediately after December 31, following their election. However, legislation enacted in 1980 excludes school directors from this common date but does not specify another date.
- Voter registration. All common schools, fire stations, and public libraries must make voter registration application forms available to the public. County auditors transmit newly completed voter registration cards as well as cancellation of voter registrations to the Secretary of State on each Monday following the registration or cancellation. The state motor voter law authorizes persons to register to vote or transfer their voter registrations when they apply for drivers' licenses.
- Declarations of candidacy. A person who files a declaration of candidacy for an elective office must, at the time of the filing, possess the qualifications to be elected to that office. The basic requirement to hold most offices is that the person be a registered voter in the geographic area represented by the office.

Statutes are in conflict as to whether a person who files a declaration of candidacy as a write-in candidate must pay the normal filing fee for the office that is sought.

- General prohibition on a candidate's name appearing more than once on a ballot. The name of a candidate for public office may not appear more than once on any ballot, but this restriction does not apply to the office of precinct committee officer for a major political party.
- Termination of on-going absentee status. A voter loses ongoing absentee status if the voter submits a written request to be removed, dies, is disqualified, the registration record of the voter is canceled, or an ongoing absentee ballot is returned as undeliverable.
- Access to election facilities. Polling places and registration facilities are generally required to be accessible to elderly and handicapped persons in primaries and general elections held in even-numbered years. Alternative polling places or procedures are provided for access to polling places and registration facilities in primaries and general elections held in odd-numbered years. Periodic reports are required on access to polling sites and registration facilities by handicapped persons and the elderly.

The Secretary of State is required to make information available to deaf persons by telecommunications.

- Reporting number of absentee ballots cast in each precinct. County auditors are required to report the number of absentee ballots cast in each precinct to the Secretary of State at general elections held in even-numbered years whenever the Secretary of State is required to canvass to vote.

Summary:

A variety of changes, both technical and substantive are made to election laws.

- Voting precincts. Voting precincts in a county no longer would be required to be numbered consecutively.
- Crimes relating to use of voter registration data. The maximum fine for using registered voter data for commercial advertising or solicitation is increased from \$5,000 to \$10,000.
- Dates school directors assume office. A newly elected school director's term of office begins at the first official meeting of the board of directors after certification of the election results.

- Voter registration. The requirement for voter registration application forms to be available at common schools, fire stations, and public libraries is modified to require county auditors to keep mail-in voter registration application forms generally available at various locations, including election offices, common schools, fire stations, and public libraries. County auditors must transmit voter registration and cancellation cards to the Secretary of State once a week. It is clarified that a voter may change his or her name for voter registration purposes when the voter applies for a driver's license.
- Declarations of candidacy. It is expressly required that a person must be a registered voter when he or she files a declaration of candidacy for an office.

The inconsistency regarding filing fees for write-in candidates is removed by requiring write-in candidates to pay the normal filing fees associated with the offices they seek.

- General prohibition on a candidate's name appearing more than once on a ballot. The exception that a candidate's name may not appear more than once on a ballot, other than the office of precinct committee officer of a major political party, is expanded to also exclude a temporary elected position, such as charter review board member or freeholder.
- Termination of ongoing absentee status. Voters who are placed into inactive status also have their ongoing absentee voter status terminated.
- Access to election facilities. Laws are revised and expanded to provide greater access to election facilities. Polling places and registration facilities must be accessible to handicapped persons and the elderly at all elections and primaries. County auditors, rather than the Secretary of State, are required to make election information available to deaf persons using telecommunications.
- Reporting number of absentee ballots cast in each precinct. The requirement for county auditors to report the number of absentee ballots cast in each precinct to the Secretary of State at general elections held in an even-numbered year, whenever the Secretary of State is required to canvass the vote, is extended to also include general elections held in odd-numbered years.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 96 0
 Senate 48 0 (Senate amended)
 House 97 0 (House concurred)

Effective: July 25, 1999