

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5472

As Passed House:
April 5, 2017

Title: An act relating to requiring ballot drop boxes in all communities.

Brief Description: Requiring ballot drop boxes in all communities.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on State Government (originally sponsored by Senator Pearson).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government, Elections & Information Technology: 3/14/17, 3/15/17, 3/21/17 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/5/17, 52-45.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires each county to have at least one ballot drop box per 15,000 registered voters in the county, and in each city, town, and census-designated area with a post office to have at least one ballot drop box.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, ELECTIONS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Appleton, Gregerson and Pellicciotti.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Koster, Ranking Minority Member; Volz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kraft.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Irwin.

Staff: Sean Flynn (786-7124).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Registered voters receive election ballots by mail for each election and may return voted ballots to the county auditor by mail or by depositing the ballot in a designated ballot drop box. Many counties have drop boxes at the county voting center as well as other permanent and temporary locations. Voting centers and drop boxes are open until 8 p.m. on election day.

The Secretary of State adopts rules specifying requirements for ballot deposit sites. Drop boxes must be secure at all times and emptied regularly by two staff.

Summary of Bill:

Each county must have one ballot drop box per 15,000 registered voters in the county. Each city, town, and census-designated place in the county with a post office must have at least one ballot drop box.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The state vote by mail system essentially imposes a poll tax on voters who have to pay for postage in order to submit a ballot. These days, it can be difficult for people to find two stamps for postage. Not all local jurisdictions have drop boxes that can be used as an alternative to voting by mail. Ballot boxes should be expanded to provide equal access across the state, including tribal reservations and rural areas. Ballot boxes are helpful for young voters on college campus and will help with voter turnout in this demographic. Permanent boxes are better and more consistent than mobile units and can be bought at affordable rates.

(Opposed) This bill would require many more ballot drop boxes installed across the state. Ballot drop box access is not a problem statewide. There should be flexibility based on community needs. County auditors know their own communities and are the most responsive to community needs. Drop box locations should be tied to population centers. This bill should exempt rural counties because it would require drop boxes in places with very small populations, and rural counties do not have the same resources as urban areas. Many small census designated locations are close together and do not require additional boxes. It is difficult to find new locations for drop boxes, and many schools and government buildings do not allow drop box.

The state should provide funding for this mandate because drop boxes are expensive and require additional staffing and training for each drop box. There should be more time allowed for implementation.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Pearson, prime sponsor; Elissa Goss, Washington Student Association; Dawn Vyvyan, Yakima Nation; and Michael Moran, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.

(Opposed) Carolyn Weikel, Greg Kimsey, and Mike Rooney, Washington Association of County Auditors; Monty Cobb, Washington Association of County Officials; and Art Swannack, Whitman County.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Josh Weiss, Washington State Association of Counties; and Alex Hur, Washington Voting Justice Coalition.