

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1310

*As Reported By House Committee on:
State Government*

Title: An act relating to voter registration by mail.

Brief Description: Establishing voter registration by mail.

Sponsor(s): Representatives McLean, R. Fisher, Anderson, Miller, Hine, Moyer, Spanel, Bowman, Kremen, Ballard, Tate, Brekke, Vance, Paris, May, Leonard, Mitchell, Jacobsen, Wineberry, Pruitt, Basich and Wang.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, January 15, 1992, DPS.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
STATE GOVERNMENT**

Majority Report: *The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass.* Signed by 10 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Pruitt, Vice Chair; McLean, Ranking Minority Member; Bowman, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler; R. Fisher; Grant; Moyer; O'Brien; and Sheldon.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background: The county auditor is the chief registrar of voters within the county. State law directs the auditor to appoint certain deputy registrars and permits the appointment of other registrars. A registration officer must interrogate an applicant for voter registration concerning the applicant's qualifications as a voter. The applicant must produce identification when it is necessary to establish the applicant's date of birth. The applicant must also sign an oath of registration or the registration officer must refuse to register the applicant.

Whenever a voter registration card is sent by an auditor to a new registrant but is returned by the U.S. Postal Service as undeliverable, the auditor must initiate an inquiry into the validity of the registration of that voter.

Each deputy registrar other than a city or town clerk or salaried county employee is entitled to receive a fee of not less than 20 cents for each elector registered.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Application by Mail or Delivery. An elector may register to vote by mail or other delivery of a completed registration form to the county auditor.

Registration Information and Oath. In addition to the information an applicant for voter registration must provide a registration officer under other provisions of law, an applicant for registration by mail must provide his or her valid Washington driver's license number; or, if the applicant has no such license, a social security number; or, if the applicant has neither, the number from a valid Washington identicard. If the application is without this identifying information, the auditor may not process the form until the information is provided.

The applicant must sign a registration oath. The applicant must also sign a portion of the registration form which may be used as an initiative signature card by the secretary of state. The registration form must contain a warning indicating that a person who knowingly supplies false information or knowingly makes a false declaration as to qualifications is guilty of a Class C felony.

Processing Applications. Upon receiving an application for registration by mail or delivery, the auditor must review the application to determine whether the information supplied is complete. If it is not, the auditor must promptly send a notice of the deficiency to the applicant. If it is complete, the applicant is considered to be registered as of the date of the postmark of the application or, if no postmark, as of the date the application was received by the auditor.

Transmitting Registration Cards; Cancellations. The auditor must send the applicant by first class mail, within 45 days but not later than seven days before the next primary or election, a voter registration card identifying his or her precinct and with other information required by the secretary of state. The U.S. Postal Service is to be instructed not to forward a voter registration card to any other address and to return undelivered cards to the auditor. If such a voter registration card is returned as undeliverable, the registration of the voter must be immediately canceled. Notice regarding the cancellation must be promptly sent to the voter.

Forms. The secretary of state must adopt an application form for registering by mail. The secretary must furnish registration forms without cost to the counties.

Registration Fees Repealed. A provision of law is repealed that entitles each deputy registrar, with certain exceptions, to receive a fee for each elector registered.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The underlying sections of law appearing in the bill are updated to reflect 1991 enactments.

Fiscal Note: Requested January 13, 1992.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect on January 1, 1992.

Testimony For: (From 1991) (1) There are one million qualified electors in this state who are not registered to vote. The bill will encourage registration. (2) Texas uses postcard voter registration and has experienced no fraud in its system. (3) It is hard for a working person to be available for voter registration during working hours; the timing has to be just right for registering before a registrar at other times. (4) The bill will promote registration all year long; this will spread an auditor's administrative needs over the year rather than having them concentrated at election time. (5) Multnomah County in Oregon addresses the issue of registering high school students by sending each student a birthday greeting and a voter registration card on the student's 18th birthday. (6) The bill will assist those confined by disabilities to register to vote.

Testimony Against: (From 1991) (1) A deputy registrar registering voters in a nursing home may easily determine whether a patient is acting under his or her own will in registering to vote. With postcard registration, this safeguard would be lost. (2) The postcard registered person does not get the temporary registration card issued to a person who registers in person.

Witnesses: (From 1991) Ralph Munro, Secretary of State (in favor); Karen Flynn and Sam Reed, County Auditors Association (in favor); Lael Braymer, League of Women Voters (in favor); Calvin Castle (opposed); Eleanora Ballascotes (opposed); and Cris Shardelman (opposed).