

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5587

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to voter accessibility.

Brief Description: Requiring voting devices to be accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Sponsors: Senators Fairley, Keiser, Kline, Winsley, Kohl-Welles and Rasmussen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 3/21/03, 3/28/03 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Establishes certification standards for voting technology and systems for the visually impaired.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Shabro, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hunt, McDermott, Nixon, Tom and Wallace.

Staff: Anne Warwick (786-7291) and Katie Blinn (786-7114).

Background:

Under Title II of the Federal "Help America Vote Act," the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services (SHHS) is authorized to administer grants to state and local governments to make polling places accessible to the disabled, including the blind and visually impaired. Grants may also be used to provide information about the accessibility of polling places. To receive funding under this section, a state or locality must submit an application to the SHHS describing activities for which assistance is sought. States must submit a report to the SHHS each fiscal year on the activities conducted with the fund.

Currently under Washington law all sensory or physically handicapped voters are assisted at the poll site, or at home if voting by absentee ballot. At a poll site, if the voter declares in the presence of an election official that he or she is unable to vote independently, the voter may designate a person of his or her choice or two election officials from opposite political parties to help record the votes as directed.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The Secretary must establish standards for the certification of voting systems and technology that are accessible to blind and visually impaired voters. All newly acquired voting technology and systems utilized by the state or any county must allow blind and visually impaired individuals access equitable to those who are not blind or visually impaired. Each polling location must have at least one certified voting unit accessible to those voters who are blind or visually impaired.

Implementation is contingent on available funds. Voting technology and systems purchased prior to the effective date must meet the requirements when an upgrade or replacement of the equipment and systems is made.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The bill clarifies that the term "blind and visually impaired" excludes persons who are both blind and deaf. The bill specifies that equal access and independence in voting is limited to voting at a poll site, and does not include absentee voting. The term "upgrade" is specific to an upgrade that is compatible with nonvisual voting technology, and the contingency for implementing this section is broadened to cover the upgrades and replacement of equipment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available on HB 1222 (companion).

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

Testimony For: Voting technology has developed to allow visually impaired voters to participate in the election process independently.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Michael Freeman, National Federation of the Blind of Washington.