

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 1279

As Passed House:
March 7, 2013

Title: An act relating to motor voter preregistration for sixteen and seventeen year olds.

Brief Description: Allowing motor voter preregistration for sixteen and seventeen year olds.

Sponsors: Representatives Bergquist, Riccelli, Hunt, Sawyer, Farrell, Stonier, Reykdal, Fitzgibbon, Lytton, Liias, Maxwell, Orwall, Jinkins, Upthegrove, Pedersen, Ryu, Carlyle, Roberts, Tharinger, Hudgins, Fey, Morrell, Santos, Pollet, Hansen and Ormsby.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Operations & Elections: 2/6/13, 2/12/13 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/7/13, 55-42.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Allows 16- and 17-year-olds to preregister to vote when applying for a driver's license or identocard.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Hunt, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Carlyle, Fitzgibbon, Orwall and Van De Wege.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Buys, Ranking Minority Member; Taylor, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Kristiansen and Manweller.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

Eligibility for voter registration requires that a person be a United States citizen and at least 18 years old on or before the next election. The Department of Licensing (DOL) is required

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to provide voter registration services to persons applying for or renewing a driver's license or identocard.

Currently, eight states and the District of Columbia authorize individuals younger than 18 years old to preregister to vote. Those eight states are Delaware, Hawaii, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, Rhode Island, California, and Oregon.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

The DOL may preregister a person to vote who is at least 16 years of age at the time he or she applies for a driver's license or identocard. The information contained in the voter preregistration application is exempt from public inspection and copying.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on January 1, 2014.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There are a lot of students that do not register to vote. Many times, those registrations are sent back because of missing information or illegible writing. At the DOL, the information is already available and allows for an easy registration process. The logic is simple. The bill will increase the chances of getting many more youth involved in voting. Over 14,000 people were registered in the year 2012. Many enthusiastic 16- and 17-year-olds want to be involved in voting. Preregistration will lead to involvement in the issues. The bill addresses the inequality of young voters participating in elections, starting with Washington. Many people are 18 years old and are not registered to vote, but do have their license. If preregistration is allowed, these people will be registered to vote at the time of applying for a driver's license. The process is easy, and a person will be able to get a license and register to vote in one trip. This will get young people interested in politics. The League of Women Voters supports the bill. It is important to improve access to voting here in Washington. While Washington has a very good voter turnout for elections, compare it to the voter turnout in other countries. Motor voter registration is very popular, and we should take advantage of that voter registration option. Voter turnout is important, and the issues brought up by the county auditors are good points. Sixteen and 17-year-olds are the most stable of those people in terms of addresses. The League of Women Voters is committed to increasing voter participation. Democracy works best when more people vote. The bill addresses a gap in voter registration. Forty percent of all voter registrations come from motor voter registrations. It is easier to register young people at the DOL because someone actually asks them if they want to register. Thousands of 16- and 17-year-olds that get their licenses currently miss out from this invitation to vote. A 2009 study indicates that an increase in voter registration of young voters increases the participation rate of that same group. The mobility of 16- and 17-year-olds is the most stable group in terms of changing addresses according to the 2010 census. The census indicated that 18- to 24-year-olds move much more. Many students vote at home for the first few years of their college career. At Central Washington University an election assistance center is available to students. At the center,

the students are able to download a ballot, fill it out, and drop it in a ballot drop box. The smaller issues can be fixed, but the bigger issues are the ones that need work. Young people vote when they register, but they register at a much lower rate. Eighty-three percent of those registered voted in the last election. There is a registration gap. The concerns of the county auditors are technical issues. Licenses are required to be updated when someone moves. The online application also requires an updated address for purposes of voter registration. Voter registration is fluid. Many people move, many people die, many people change their name. The mechanisms are already in place to address these issues. The DOL is the perfect place to preregister young people to vote because it is their first contact with government.

(Opposed) While the concept of greater participation is supported, preregistration turnout does not increase voter participation. The current vote-by-mail system captures many of the conveniences. Many can already register to vote before they turn 18 years old. The increased complexity of the process will increase costs with no parallel results. Motor voter registration misses the mark. The message should focus on why young people should vote. An outreach effort to local high schools would have better results. A 17-1/2-year-old may register to vote and the registration may be processed if they will be 18 years old at the time of the next election. The address of the person registering to vote determines what the next election will be and whether or not he or she would be eligible to be officially registered. It requires human interaction. The bill will broaden preregistration and increase the risk of registration before they are eligible to vote. The bill is compatible with the current system, and does not require any changes. If only a few of the election-related bills pass, it will lead to a tripling of the election budget request in the county. Only so much can be done with the current technology. Grants under the Help America Vote Act are no longer available to pay for the service agreements for our voter registration systems, and those costs are now paid for by each county. Kittitas County constantly works with Central Washington University students to get current addresses from the students that have registered in the previous year. These students tend to move on a regular basis. Addresses are not always complete because apartment numbers are not included. For 16- and 17-year-olds that preregister, there will also be a number of them who move.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Bergquist, prime sponsor; Monica Mendoza Castrejon, One America and The Washington Bus; Riley Evetts; Lonnie Johns-Brown, League of Women Voters; Abigail Doerr, The Washington Bus; Jackie Sperlich, Associated Students of Central Washington University; and Miguel Perez-Gibson, Latino Progress Alliance.

(Opposed) Matt Beaton, Franklin County Auditor's Office; and Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.