

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5184

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As of January 23, 2015

**Title:** An act relating to authorizing counties to establish and conduct polling place voting.

**Brief Description:** Authorizing counties to establish and conduct polling place voting.

**Sponsors:** Senators Benton and Hasegawa.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Government Operations & Security (Note: Senate Resolution 8609 adopted January 27, 2015, renamed the Committee on Government Operations & State Security to Committee on Government Operations & Security): 1/22/15.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & SECURITY

**Staff:** Samuel Brown (786-7470)

**Background:** Washington is one of three states conducting elections entirely by mail. As early as 1915, a voter was allowed to cast an absentee ballot if the voter was not able to be present to vote at the polls on election day. In 1933 voters with disabilities and voters over the age of 65 were authorized to vote via absentee ballot. In 1974 the Legislature expanded absentee voting to all voters who made a request, and by 1993 those voters could request to vote absentee on an ongoing basis. In 2005 counties were allowed to begin conducting all elections entirely by mail ballot. In 2011, when the Legislature required that all elections in the state be held entirely by mail, only Pierce County retained voting at polling places.

**Summary of Bill:** A county may authorize polling-place voting in all or part of the county. Registered voters in a county may petition the county's legislative authority to adopt an ordinance authorizing polling-place voting by submitting petitions signed by at least 8 percent of registered voters in the county who voted in the previous gubernatorial election. Polling-place voting may be authorized by a ordinance adopted by the county legislative authority after a public hearing and receiving testimony on the matter.

Standards for conducting polling-place voting, if adopted by a county, are provided. Standards for voting and ballot counting devices in jurisdictions conducting polling-place voting are provided. Counties are authorized to adopt regulations to further implement polling-place voting.

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*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.*

A voter in a county that has authorized polling-place voting must continue to receive ballots by mail unless the voter indicates that the voter will vote at a polling place.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** CON: We believe it is the wrong path to go away from vote by mail. Every county has to operate at least one voting center, and can operate as many polling sites as they wish in parallel to the vote-by-mail system. King County had to hire 5000 poll workers for the last polling place election. Counties would have to buy new equipment for polling place elections because all the old equipment is gone.

**Persons Testifying:** CON: Monty Cobb, WA Assn. of County Officials.