

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6021

As Passed Senate, January 17, 2018

Title: An act relating to extending the period for voter registration.

Brief Description: Extending the period for voter registration.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Kuderer, Billig, Darneille, Palumbo, Frockt, Rolfes, Lias, Keiser, Pedersen, Hunt, Wellman, Conway, Saldaña, Hasegawa, Mullet and Nelson).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 1/10/18, 1/12/18 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed Senate: 1/17/18, 29-20.

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Authorizes voter registration by mail or electronically up to eight days before an election.
- Authorizes in-person voter registration and voter registration updates up to 8:00 p.m. the day of the election.
- Directs county auditors to accept in-person voter registration at certain sites.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6021 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Kuderer, Vice Chair; Miloscia, Ranking Member; Saldaña.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

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.

Background: Voter Registration Deadlines. To register to vote, a person must submit an application via mail or an online registration no later than 29 days before the day of the next primary, special, or general election, or in person at their county auditor's office no later than eight days before the election.

A person may update voter registration at least 29 days before an election for the change to be effective for that election. A voter who does not transfer the voter's residential information by that deadline may still vote, but will vote in races affecting the voter's previous address.

Voting Centers. Each county auditor is required to establish at least one voting center 18 days before each election. The voting center must provide voter registration materials, replacement ballots, provisional ballots, disability access voting devices, sample ballots, voter pamphlets, instructions on how to vote the ballot, and a ballot drop box. County auditors have discretion to establish additional voting centers, and may provide some or all of the services required of the initial voting center.

Summary of First Substitute Bill: Voter Registration Deadlines. Voter registrations submitted electronically or through the mail must be received eight days before an election for a person to be eligible to participate in that election. Voter registrations may be submitted in-person at the county auditor's office, county elections office, or another location designated by the county auditor up to 8:00 p.m. the day of the election for a person to participate in that election. A person may update their voter registration information up to 8:00 p.m. the day of the election.

Voter Registration Locations. The county auditor must register voters in-person at the county auditor's office and the county elections office, if in a different city than the county auditor's office. For presidential elections, the county auditor must open a voting center in every additional city in the county not presently accepting in-person voter registrations with a population of 100,000 or more, which is not required to be open the Sunday before the election.

At least one additional location, designated by the county auditor for accepting voter registrations besides the auditor's office or county elections office, must provide the same services as a voting center. Voting centers should be located in public buildings or buildings leased by public entities such as libraries.

Notification. The 2018 general election voter's pamphlet must contain information about the updates to voter registration deadlines in this act.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on June 30, 2019.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: The trend in voter participation has been decreasing, and turnout was as low as 28 percent in some counties last year. We need to remove obstacles and expand access to the vote, because democracy only works if people can participate. A 29-day deadline in the age of technology where you register online is too long and an absolute barrier to some people. Concerns about double voting are farfetched. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have election day registration, and provide guides for implementation. Extending the voter registration deadline means voters can engage in elections when they are hearing the most from candidates. Voting is habit-forming and contagious; when someone votes once, they're likely to vote again. If Wisconsin could do this in 1976, we can do this in 2018. Young people and underserved communities are more mobile, particularly in the fall, before general elections are happening. We have less than ten days to register students to vote at the beginning of the fall quarter. As a county auditor, my duty is to make sure that every eligible voter can participate. I look forward to the day when I don't have to turn away people who want to register to vote. A single deadline will help with messaging. There should be no barriers to voting, and people shouldn't be penalized for coming to the process late. In 2016, over one million eligible Washingtonians were not registered to vote. Turnout increases up to 10 percent in states with election day registration. This would be extremely helpful for college students looking to update existing registrations. By the time some voters realize there are candidates who connect with them personally, they've missed the registration deadline.

CON: The Secretary of State supports election day registration, but encourages a phased-in approach and wants to make sure the technology is in place to do this securely. There are concerns that the modernization of the voter registration system will not happen by the bill's effective date. Laws need to be changed to allow transfers between counties more seamlessly and clarify that if any deadline falls on a holiday, it moves to the next day.

OTHER: We support shortened deadlines and are committed to elimination of barriers to participation, but have concerns about implementation of the policy. Counties need funding for conducting even-year elections, and the bill should be tied to implementation of the voter registration database update. The bulk of increased turnout will be toward election day, and maintaining a 28-day cutoff on in-state registration transfers will help alleviate the workload. Counties have difficulty increasing staff during this period to process new applications, and could use help with the associated costs.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Patty Kuderer, Prime Sponsor; Alex Hur, Washington Voting Justice Coalition; Kathy Sakahara, League of Women Voters; Sean Jacobson, The Washington Bus; Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor; Arne Nelson, Washington Student Association; Cindy Black, Fix Democracy First; Julie Wise, King County Auditor; RaShelle Davis, Governor's Office; Gracie Anderson, Legislative Youth Advisory Council; Oskar Zambrano, Progreso.

CON: Lori Augino, Office of the Secretary of State.

OTHER: Julie Anderson, Washington State Association of County Auditors; Dolores Gilmore, Kitsap County Auditor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.