

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1520

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections, March 15, 2019

Title: An act relating to calendar election dates on ballot envelopes.

Brief Description: Concerning calendar election dates on ballot envelopes.

Sponsors: House Committee on State Government & Tribal Relations (originally sponsored by Representatives Morgan, Hudgins, Rude, Mead, Stonier, Frame, Riccelli, Appleton, Pellicciotti, Kilduff, Doglio and Reeves).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/01/19, 95-0.

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 3/11/19, 3/15/19 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Amended Bill

- Requires the county auditor to prominently display the date of the election on the envelope in which a voter receives a ballot and other election materials.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Kuderer, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Member; Hasegawa and Takko.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: All counties in the state conduct elections entirely by mail. County auditors must send each voter a ballot with a voter declaration that must be signed, a security envelope to conceal the ballot after voting, and a larger envelope to return the security envelope. The voter also must receive instructions on how to obtain information about the election, how to complete the ballot, and how to return the ballot to the county auditor.

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.

The county auditor must provide notice for any election between 5 and 15 days prior to the deadline for mail-in voter registration in one or more newspapers with information about the date of the election, the offices or measures appearing on the ballot, voter registration, and how to obtain a ballot.

Summary of Amended Bill: The county auditor must prominently display the date of the election in bold type and at least size 20 font on the envelope in which a voter receives a ballot and other election materials:

- for general elections beginning in 2020;
- for primary elections beginning in 2021; and
- for all elections in 2022 and thereafter.

EFFECT OF STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE AMENDMENT(S):

- The election date must be printed on presidential preference primary ballot envelopes beginning in 2020.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Substitute House Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: When I ask constituents why we have low voter turnout, the top answer is that they do not know the election date. Having the ballot return date on the outside of the envelope is a simple, meaningful change that ensures better access to democracy. Sweepstakes mailings and credit card applications have return dates on the outside of the envelope. Research shows that when people have little pieces of information that help them vote, they are more likely to vote. Elections are no longer single-day affairs; the election period starts even earlier for overseas and military voters. Staggering in the implementation date gives auditors time to consult with our envelope vendors. This shows people the deadline at a glance, and we hope it reduces the number of late-postmarked ballots.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Melanie Morgan, Prime Sponsor; Andrew Villeneuve, Northwest Progressive Institute; Julie Anderson, Washington State Association of County Auditors; Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor.

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