

SB 683 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Rules

Prepared By: Cherie Stone, LPRO Analyst

Meeting Dates: 3/6

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires state to pay for ballot return envelopes, returnable by business reply mail, for each election held after January 1, 2019.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

BACKGROUND:

Vote-by-mail is an election method that permits voters to receive and return their ballots through the mail, and is an alternative to traditional polling place elections. In the 1998 General Election, Oregon voters approved Measure 60, an initiative requiring vote-by-mail in all biennial primary and general elections.

For state elections, counties are required to send a mail ballot packet to each active registered voter between the 18th and the 14th day before an election. Additionally, statute requires that ballots for long term absent electors are mailed 45 days before an election, and ballots for electors with an out of state mailing address are mailed 30 days before an election. The ballot packet must include the appropriate ballot, a secrecy envelope and a pre-addressed return envelope. Once received, the voter marks the ballot and places it in the secrecy envelope, which is subsequently placed into the return envelope. The voter must then sign the return envelope in order for the ballot to be counted.

Current statute provides two methods for a voter to return their ballot, the voter may either pay the 49-cent postage cost and mail the envelope, or take it to a drop site designated by the County Clerk's Office within the voters' county of residence. Ballots must be received by the county, either through the mail or at a drop-off site within the county, by 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election. The date on the postmark does not mitigate the validity of a ballot that is received after 8:00 p.m. on the day of an election.

Beginning January 1, 2019, Senate Bill 683 would eliminate the current requirement that an elector bear the cost of postage if returning their ballot by mail. Alternatively, SB683 would require that each elector be provided with a ballot return envelope that is returnable by business reply mail and specifies that the state must bear the cost of postage.