

SB 861 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Rules

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Meeting Dates: 3/11, 3/18

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires state to pay postage on ballot return envelopes for each election held in state. Applies to elections held on or after January 1, 2021.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Increased participation
- Barriers to voting
- Cost

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Applies to elections held on or after January 1, 2020. Authorizes Secretary of State to require ballot return by method other than business reply mail, if Secretary determines that alternative method is more cost effective or efficient.

BACKGROUND:

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, at least 22 states have provisions allowing some elections to be conducted entirely by mail. States have been trending towards all-mail elections in recent years, with Washington and Colorado joining Oregon as states that allow vote-by-mail in all elections. Some states, including California, Utah and Hawaii, have authorized certain counties to conduct all elections by mail, while still other states authorize specific local governments to conduct elections by mail. In 2018, executive branch officials in Washington state made a one-time decision to pay for the costs of election postage and legislation is currently pending in that state to require the state to regularly reimburse counties for these costs.

Senate Bill 861 requires the state to bear the cost of providing ballot return envelopes that may be returned by business reply mail, for each election held in this state.