
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 491

AN ACT CONCERNING THE SECRETARY OF THE STATE'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING.

SUMMARY

This bill expands absentee voting to all eligible voters who will not appear at their designated polling place on the day of an election, primary, or referendum (election contest), instead of just to voters who had a specified reason (§ 1).

The bill also requires the secretary of the state (SOTS) to develop and install absentee ballot-tracking software that is integrated with the Centralized Voter Registration System (CVRS). At a minimum, the software must track (1) when an absentee ballot application is received and accepted by the town clerk; (2) when the ballot is (a) mailed out by the clerk, (b) delivered to the applicant, or (c) delivered to the clerk; and (3) whether the ballot was accepted, requires curing, or is rejected (§ 8).

The bill also makes several changes to the absentee balloting procedures, including the following:

1. implements use of a singular “return envelope” for ballot return and in doing so combines the inner and outer envelopes used under current law, and makes corresponding changes;
2. replaces the required serial numbers on the envelope with unique ballot identification numbers, and makes corresponding changes;
3. eliminates the prohibition on misrepresenting absentee ballot eligibility requirements to any elector or prospective applicant (§ 1);
4. amends the information that Department of Correction (DOC) employees must provide on absentee ballot applications for

- incarcerated applicants they assist (§ 4);
5. adjusts requirements for certain entities that send out unsolicited absentee ballot applications (§ 4);
 6. modifies how absentee ballots are cast and collected (§ 6);
 7. creates procedures for voters to cure certain rejected absentee ballots (§ 7);
 8. modifies certain deadlines for delivering absentee ballots to town clerks and when absentee ballot counters must report to the counting location (§§ 7 & 10);
 9. extends permanent absentee voting eligibility to all eligible voters (§ 9);
 10. expands the ways in which a person's permanent absentee ballot status loses effect and correspondingly eliminates the registrar's annual verification requirement (§ 9); and
 11. requires voters, including those overseas, casting presidential ballots to print their name on the return envelope in addition to signing it as under current law (§ 14).

The bill also requires SOTS to create and conduct a statewide mailing, as soon as possible after the bill is enacted, to inform all voters of the changes to the state's absentee balloting and permanent absentee ballot status eligibility laws. SOTS must also make the mailing materials available to town clerks and, once provided, the clerks must include them with all absentee ballot applications that they distribute in 2026 (§ 9).

The bill also makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

NO-EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING

Under current law, in order to apply for and cast an absentee ballot,

a voter must be unable to appear at his or her designated polling place on election day due to (1) active service in the U.S. armed forces; (2) absence from their city or town; (3) sickness or physical disability; (4) their religious beliefs prohibiting secular activity on that day; or (5) service as an election, primary, or referendum official at a polling place other than his or her own during all voting hours. The bill eliminates these requirements and, instead, allows any eligible voter who completes and submits an absentee ballot application to attain permanent absentee ballot status.

ABSENTEE BALLOT MATERIALS

Absentee Ballot Applications

The bill requires an absentee ballot application to display a unique ballot ID number instead of being consecutively numbered.

Return Envelopes

Under current law, absentee ballot sets consist of a ballot, an outer envelope with information about the elector (such as their name and address), and an inner envelope with a statement signed by the elector under penalty of false statement in absentee balloting. Once the elector has filled out the ballot, he or she must insert the ballot into the inner envelope, seal it inside, and then insert the inner envelope into the outer one.

The bill instead consolidates the information on the inner and outer envelopes into one absentee balloting envelope (a return envelope). Further, the bill modifies the information that must be on the return envelope by removing language regarding excuses to vote absentee from the statement the voter signs, and by requiring:

1. the voter to also print their name on the face of the envelope, which, under existing law and the bill, must be signed and capable of being sealed;
2. the envelope be endorsed with the words "OFFICIAL ABSENTEE BALLOT";
3. a label with specified information generated by the Centralized

Voter Registration System (CVRS; see below)

4. a return label displaying a unique ballot identification number (see below);
5. a notice regarding certain state absentee ballot handling laws (see below); and
6. the clerk's official address to be inscribed before the absentee ballot set is issued.

Additionally, the bill requires town clerks to provide an additional envelope that is pre-addressed to the clerk if the voter is required by federal law to mail back their identification (see BACKGROUND). Currently, any required identification must be placed in the outer envelope.

Required Labels. The CVRS label must include (1) the sender's name and return address; (2) the applicant's name, address, and voting district; (3) the ballot style; (4) a unique ballot identification number; (5) the date of the election contest; and (6) if for a primary, the name of the political party holding that primary.

The bill requires the ballot ID number on the return labels to be in a text format and as a scannable barcode (instead of requiring all outer envelopes to be serially and consecutively numbered as under current law).

Absentee Ballot Restrictions Notice. The return envelope's notice must warn anyone handling the absentee ballot about state law's (1) restrictions on who may possess and return absentee ballots and (2) restrictions and penalties regarding completing or executing absentee ballots.

Ballot Identification Numbers

Regarding the change from serial numbers to unique ID numbers, the bill correspondingly requires clerks to ensure the unique ballot ID number that appears on the return envelope matches the one on the

application form. As under current law, clerks must keep a list of unique ballot ID numbers and the name of the applicant receiving the corresponding absentee ballot set. They must also do so for any additional absentee voting sets they issue (for example, replacements) and ballots of presidential voters and overseas electors.

Relatedly, the bill eliminates the requirement for the clerk to issue absentee ballot sets in consecutive ascending numerical order based on the envelope's serial numbers.

Other Materials

State law generally prohibits including anything else with an absentee voting set except (1) for alternate applications for certain military personnel and overseas voters and (2) when necessary to correct errors and omissions as allowed by state law. The bill additionally allows any voting information SOTS requires to be included, but explicitly prohibits including voting information promoting a question's success or defeat.

§ 4 — ABSENTEE BALLOT APPLICATION DISTRIBUTION

State law generally requires individuals requesting or distributing absentee ballot applications for other people to (1) register with the town clerk if distributing five or more applications, excluding those for family members, for a specific election contest and (2) keep a log of who received their applications, including specified details, and file it with the town clerk.

The bill eliminates a prohibition against distributing absentee ballot applications unless the application specifies the year in which the application may be used. However, the bill maintains the provision in current law that prohibits clerks from accepting and people from using ballot applications without the correct year noted.

Similarly, candidates, parties, and political committees (or candidates' or committees' agents) may mail unsolicited applications to voters if they include a written (1) explanation of the eligibility requirements for voting absentee (including the reasons needed) and (2)

warning about the penalties for violating these requirements.

The bill expands these requirements by (1) applying them to delivered ballots, in addition to mailed ballots, and (2) requiring a disclaimer noting the individual or committee that paid for the mailing or delivery. If the mailing or delivery was paid for by a candidate, the disclaimer must also note that the candidate approved it. Additionally, the bill eliminates the requirement under current law for the mailing to explain the eligibility criteria and warn the person that voting by absentee ballot without being eligible may result in civil or criminal penalties. Instead, it requires a written explanation of the options for returning absentee ballots under state law.

§ 4 — ABSENTEE BALLOT APPLICATIONS FOR INCARCERATED VOTERS

By law, anyone assisting a voter in completing their absentee ballot must sign the application and print their name, residential address, and telephone number on it. Additionally, the law outlines procedures for DOC employees to distribute, collect, and return absentee ballots for incarcerated voters who have retained their voting rights.

The bill specifies that DOC employees who assist these voters with their absentee ballot applications must instead provide the address and telephone number of the facility where they are employed and provided the assistance, instead of their residential address and personal telephone number.

§§ 6 & 24 — RETURN OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS

The bill deems an absentee ballot cast when it is (1) received, (2) signed by the voter on the return envelope's affirmation, and (3) accepted by the town clerk. Correspondingly, the bill repeals a provision allowing a voter to withdraw their absentee ballot.

The bill also requires town clerks to retrieve ballots from absentee ballot drop boxes on each business day instead of each weekday as under current law.

§ 7 — ABSENTEE BALLOT CURING

The bill establishes procedures for voters to “cure” their absentee ballots if they failed to sign the required statement on the return envelope. Under the bill, voters may cure their ballots from the beginning of the absentee voting period until the close of the polls on election day.

The bill requires town clerks to make their best efforts to contact a voter who failed to sign the envelope, but generally not later than 24 hours after receiving the voter’s ballot. For ballots received within 24 hours before the polls close, the town clerk must start using best efforts immediately after receiving the ballot.

Under the bill, “best efforts” must at least include contacting voters through the phone numbers and email addresses they provide on the absentee ballot application and voter registration. If this information was not provided, the clerk may exercise discretion in contacting the voter through other means.

§§ 7 & 10 — ABSENTEE BALLOT PROCESSING

Town Clerk’s Sorting and Delivery of Absentee Ballots to Registrars (§ 7)

The bill allows town clerks to begin sorting absentee ballots into voting districts on the first day absentee ballot sets are issued, instead of starting seven days before the election as under current law.

By law, the clerk must then deliver the absentee ballots to the registrars to be checked. Once the checking is complete, the registrars return the unopened ballots to the clerk, who must seal and hold them until the election day. The clerk follows this procedure for all ballots received by 11:00 a.m. on the weekday before the election.

For ballots received before this time, the law establishes deadlines by which the clerk must deliver the stored absentee ballots to the registrars. The bill changes these deadlines as described in the table below.

Table: Deadlines for Delivering Absentee Ballots on Election Day

Type of Election Contest	Current Law's Deadline	The Bill's Deadline
Election	10:00 am – 12:00 pm or a mutually agreed upon time before 8:00 pm	7:00 am
Primary		
Referendum	12:00 pm or a mutually agreed upon time before 8:00 pm	
Special election or referendum	As above for regular contests	7:00 am or a mutually agreed upon time before 4:00 pm

State law also, unchanged by the bill, sets deadlines for delivering absentee ballots to the registrars that are received by the town clerk after 11:00 a.m. on the weekday before the election.

Absentee Ballot Counting (§ 10)

The bill requires absentee ballot counters to go to the counting location immediately when the polls open on election day, instead of at the time the registrar designates as under current law.

§ 9 — PERMANENT ABSENTEE VOTING

State law allows certain voters to request that registrars automatically send an absentee ballot to them for each election they are eligible for. The bill allows any eligible voter to request permanent absentee ballot status, instead of just voters who are permanently physically disabled or suffering from a long-term illness.

Current law also requires that registrars annually verify that each permanent absentee ballot voter still resides at their address by sending them a written notice. Electors may lose permanent absentee ballot status if (1) they are removed from the municipality's registration list, (2) the notice is returned undeliverable, or (3) the voter requests removal.

The bill eliminates the notice requirement and the related reason for removal and instead additionally requires a voter be removed for other specified reasons, including if the ballot is returned as undeliverable.

Removal is also required if the voter is placed on the inactive registry

list. Voters may be placed on the list for a variety of reasons under state law, including if registrars are notified of a person's death or disenfranchisement. A voter may also be placed on the inactive list if the registrar (1) has reason to believe that the voter moved, (2) sent notice as required by state law, and (3) did not receive a return card within 30 days of mailing it or it was returned undeliverable. State law establishes procedures for reactivating a person's registration if he or she has been placed on the inactive registry list.

Under the bill, the voter must also be removed from the permanent absentee ballot list if he or she submits a change of address form to the U.S. Postal Service's National Change of Address System indicating a new out-of-state address. The bill also requires removal if SOTS or the applicable registrar receives information from an out-of-state admitting official that the voter has registered to vote there.

Similarly, a voter may also be removed if the applicable registrar receives certain information that the voter moved out of state. Specifically, the information must come from another state or the federal government as part of an agreement to share information to help mutually update voter registration systems.

BACKGROUND

Identification Under Federal Law

By law, if a voter registers to vote by mail and does not meet federal identification requirements at the time of registration, the voter must give sufficient identification the first time they seek to vote absentee. If a voter fails to do so, the absentee ballot cannot be counted. Acceptable forms of identification include certain documents with the voter's name and address (such as bank statements or utility bills) or valid photo identification with the voter's name and address (CGS § 9-23r).

Related Bills

sSB 495, reported favorably by the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee, restricts persons with certain convictions from distributing absentee ballot applications.

sHB 5001, reported favorably by the GAE Committee, among other things, includes identical provisions as this bill.

HB 5530, reported favorably by the GAE Committee, requires a study of absentee ballot access in unconsolidated cities and boroughs within a town.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Government Administration and Elections Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 13 Nay 5 (03/20/2026)