

Testimony to the House Committee on State Government and Tribal Affairs

In re: HB 1742 “Providing for privacy protection for certain voter registration information”.

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee –

My name is Stefan Sharkansky. I write for the Sound Politics blog. I’m here to oppose this bill, because the only thing it would accomplish is to sweep election mistakes under the rug.

Voter birthdates and ballot envelope signatures are indispensable for the public to maintain election integrity challenge ineligible voters and discover and report systemic elections errors. That is why the disclosure of this information must be protected and this bill rejected.

I’ve brought some copies of ballot envelopes that illustrate the kinds of errors I’m talking about and that I was able to obtain only because I had access to the information that this bill aims to make secret. Hopefully this exposure will help prompt officials to correct the underlying flaws.

First some cases where sloppy procedures permitted several people to vote more than once in the same election.

- Here are several pairs of envelopes where the voter cast both an absentee ballot and a provisional ballot where both were counted. The signatures in each pair are identical. These are just a few of many such cases. If you ever wondered why there were more votes than voters in King County in 2004, double counting of absentee and provisional ballots from the same voter is one of the reasons.
- This voter was only registered once, but for some reason he received two absentee ballots, both of which were voted and counted. Identical signatures.
- These are two examples of voters who were registered twice and where both their ballots were voted and counted. In each example, identical birthdates on the registration records. Identical signatures on the ballot envelopes.
- This voter was also registered twice. One mail ballot was sent to the voter’s Seattle residence, the other to his temporary address in Japan. Both mail ballots were voted and counted. The signatures are completely different. One of the signatures is presumably legitimate. The other is probably a forgery.

Elections officials didn’t expose these errors, they swept them under the rug. It was only other volunteers and I who were allowed to access birthdates and photograph signatures who could bring these errors to public attention.

The fact that both of the last two ballots were counted means that both passed “signature verification”. In spite of all the happy talk from election officials about how secure and reliable “signature verification” is, in reality it doesn’t always work very well. Here are some more examples of obviously bad signature verification, which I can show you only because I was allowed to copy the envelopes.

- This ballot envelope was issued to a Thomas Long, and it was counted, even though the signature reads Amy Richardson.
- This ballot was issued to Wendy Lee, but it was counted, even though the signature reads Osman Hayatt.
- This voter’s signature was rejected and her ballot wasn’t counted. But because I could copy the signature and phone number, I was able to contact the voter, confirm that it was her signature, and publicize this example of a legitimate voter who was disenfranchised by bad signature verification.

Without public access to envelope signatures, the problems with signature verification would be swept under the rug.

It should be obvious there are certain flaws in our elections procedures that need to be fixed. Without transparency these flaws will not be fixed. Don't let the elections officials sweep their mistakes under the rug. Defend the public's right to examine and publicize this information. Say no to this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.