

HCS HB 731 -- AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION

SPONSOR: Bland Manlove

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Special Committee on Criminal Justice by a vote of 7 to 0. Voted "Do Not Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Administrative Oversight by a vote of 4 to 6.

This bill allows a person desiring to vote absentee to do so by submitting an application to the appropriate election authority. Such person will be required to provide an appropriate form of voter ID or sign an affidavit. The application must include, among other things, whether the applicant is incapacitated or confined due to illness or physical disability or is a person who is primarily responsible for the physical care of a person who is incapacitated or confined due to illness or disability. The applicant will not have to indicate the reason the person would like to vote absentee, as this bill repeals that requirement.

The bill requires properly cast absentee ballots to be counted after the closing of polls on election day. If the voter who cast the ballot dies between the time the ballot was cast and the closing of the polls, the ballot must still be counted if it was postmarked or delivered in person to the election authority before the day of the voter's death.

The bill also requires the Secretary of State to enable a system for automatic voter registration that will make use of driver's license information from the Department of Revenue to register voters. Those eligible for registration will receive notice and a chance to decline registration. Local election authorities will retain the ability to screen voters for eligibility, to conduct notice for registration, and to remove ineligible voters from registration lists.

Those eligible to vote upon release from incarceration, probation, and parole are included in the automatic voter registration process and the Board of Probation and Parole is required to provide the requisite information to the Missouri Secretary of State's office.

The bill requires the Secretary of State's office to develop a course on proper methods for registering voters for employees of state agencies that are required to offer voter registration in conjunction with the services they provide.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that there is specific language in this legislation that relates to individuals who have been incarcerated because many individuals who have been released after incarceration

do not know that their voting rights have been restored. Such individuals should receive a packet upon release to help them be reintegrated into society. Too many people are being missed and it is important to engage in the democratic process. Individuals who have been incarcerated and are raising and providing for families in Missouri communities should not be disempowered. This would provide for an opt-out opportunity for those who are renewing their driver's licenses and do not want to be re-registered to vote. The movement toward automatic voter registration is growing across the country and there should be equal access to the polls.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Bland Manlove; AFT - Missouri; American Federation of Teachers; American Civil Liberties Union Missouri; and Nicole Lynch, Empower Missouri.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that duplication of existing voter registration is a concern. By allowing for automatic registration, the responsibility that comes along with voting may be reduced. If a voter does not sign a voter ID card, the Secretary of State will not have that person's signature on file. The office would oppose automatic registration even if the Division of Probation and Parole were to have a signature card on hand for individuals who are being re-registered.

Testifying against the bill was the Office of the Missouri Secretary of State.