

HCS HB 1639 -- PRIMARY ELECTIONS

SPONSOR: Taylor

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elections and Elected Officials by a vote of 4 to 3.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 1639.

Beginning January 1, 2021, this bill allows established political parties to use a state funded, closed political primary system conducted by local election authorities. The local election authority will allow registration of voters as members of a particular political party and enforce time limits on registration or changing political parties as specified in the bill. The Secretary of State shall maintain voter registration and party affiliation records and provide such information to local election authorities as specified in the bill. If the state funded closed primary system is not employed, then political parties may submit candidates chosen by caucus or some other method funded by the political party for a general election to the requisite election authority.

Persons not previously registered to vote in Missouri may choose a party affiliation and register until the fourth Wednesday before a primary election. Independent candidates must be unaffiliated with a political party no later than the 23rd Tuesday before a primary election in order to run for office. Political party candidates must be affiliated with their party no later than six months prior to the last Tuesday in February. Any candidates selected by nominating committees must be affiliated with the requisite political party no later than 23 weeks prior to the date of selection.

This bill establishes the "Integrity in Political Party Voting Act". Local election authorities shall notify registered voters of the primary election system using current notices mailed to voters and party affiliation changes will be noted beginning January 1, 2021. The voter registration application form will allow an initial choice of party affiliation during the presidential primary, August primary, or general election. Party identity will be required to remain the same for one year after a primary election held after January 1, 2025.

The closed primary system applies to the presidential primary as well as other state and federal races (Section 115.628, RSMo).

This bill is the same as HB 922 (2019).

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the bill will create a closed primary system in order to restore integrity to the election system and prevent tactical voting. Political parties are private organizations which should have their candidates chosen by members of the party. Nine states have a closed primary system which has functioned very well. Everyone retains a choice among party candidates at the general election.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Taylor and Bev Ehlen.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that the change to a closed primary system could upset independent or unaffiliated voters and cost money. Opinion polls show fairly consistent opposition by the general public to a closed primary system. People don't want to be labeled or limited when they vote. Local elections should be exempt from the provisions of this bill.

Testifying against the bill were, Missouri Association of County Clerks and Election Authorities; Rick Watson, Missouri Association of County Clerks and Election Authorities.

This bill is the same as HB 922 (2019).