

HCS HBs 126 & 367 -- Elections

SPONSOR: Veit

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elections by a vote of 7 to 4. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Legislative by a vote of 7 to 2.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HBs 126 & 367.

Currently, voters can cast an absentee ballot by mail or in person at the office of the election authority if they will be unable to vote in person on election day for a number of specified reasons. Beginning two weeks prior to the date of the election, no excuse is needed if the voter is voting an absentee ballot in person at the office of the election authority. This bill extends the no-excuse in-person absentee voting period from two weeks to six weeks prior to the date of the election.

This bill reinstates the presidential preference primary election, to be held statewide on the first Tuesday in March of each presidential election year.

A person who files to be included on the presidential primary ballot is not prohibited from filing as a party candidate for nomination to another office.

Specific deadlines for administrative actions by local election authorities and the Secretary of State that are necessary to hold the presidential preference primary are specified in the bill.

The conduct of the presidential preference primary must conform as nearly as possible to that prescribed for the primary election for State officers.

All costs of the presidential preference primary, except for proportional costs for any political subdivision or special district holding an election on the same day, will be paid by the State.

This bill is similar to HB 347 (2023).

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

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the ability to participate in a presidential primary is a bipartisan concern among voters. Voter

participation is a vital aspect of the health of the government. More people being involved is better for democracy and better for the candidates. The caucus system excludes a lot of important groups from the process of candidate selection, like seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, people with childcare needs, and people with demanding jobs. Caucus participation was less than ten percent of the voter turnout of the last presidential primary. Moving the date of the primary will give Missouri more influence in the selection process and is a great way to get the attention of national candidates. Expanding no-excuse in-person absentee voting will lead to safer and more secure elections.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Veit; Missouri Farm Bureau; Tommie Hollins Sr, "Naacp"; Denise Lieberman, Missouri Voter Protection Coalition; Russ Carnahan, Missouri Democratic Party; Arnie Dienoff; Health Forward Foundation; Secure Democracy USA; Missouri Republican Party; Missouri Voter Protection Coalition.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say they supported removing the presidential primary, but the sponsor worked with them to make the administration of the presidential primary as agreeable as it could be for election administrators. Moving the date will cause less overlap with April municipal elections, and extending no-excuse in-person voting will greatly relieve pressure on election officials in the two weeks before the date of the election.

Testifying in person on the bill were Dan Shaul; and Kurt Bahr.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.