

HCS HB 638 -- ELECTION CHALLENGERS

SPONSOR: Matthiesen

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elections by a vote of 6 to 2 with 1 voting present. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Legislative by a vote of 8 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 638.

Currently, election challengers can be physically present in polling locations while ballots are cast on election day.

This bill allows election challengers in first class counties and charter counties to be physically present while ballots are cast during the in-person absentee voting period.

The bill requires the chair of each county committee of each political party named on the ballot to designate election watchers four days before a watcher can enter a polling or counting location. Information is to be presented to and signed off by the local election authority. If an election authority determines that a watcher does not meet the statutory qualifications, the chair can designate a replacement watcher before 5:00 pm on the Monday before the election.

This bill allows election watchers in first class counties and charter counties to be physically present at in-person absentee voting locations while ballots are being counted or prepared for counting.

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 law currently only allows challengers and watchers on election day. With the adoption of no-excuse in-person absentee voting, different jurisdictions handled challengers and watchers in different ways. Some election authorities allowed challengers in those locations during that time and others did not. The inconsistent application of the law confused voters and challengers. This bill increases transparency and ensures the rights of all eligible participants are respected. This will enhance accountability and public trust in elections.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Matthiesen; Travis Heins; Kurt Bahr; Arnie Dienoff.

OPPONENTS: There was no opposition voiced to the committee.

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.