

STATE GOVERNMENT
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SENATE FILE 120
BY HANSEN

Passed Senate, Date _____ Passed House, Date _____
Vote: Ayes _____ Nays _____ Vote: Ayes _____ Nays _____
Approved _____

A BILL FOR

1 An Act giving the county commissioner of elections authority to
2 allow elections in certain cities to be conducted by mail
3 ballots and providing penalties.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

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SF 120
STATE GOVERNMENT

1 Section 1. NEW SECTION. 49B.1 MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS.

2 A mail ballot election may be conducted in cities with a
3 population of two hundred or less as provided in this chapter.

4 Sec. 2. NEW SECTION. 49B.2 DEFINITIONS.

5 As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise
6 requires:

7 1. "Election day" is the date established by law on which
8 a particular election would be held if that election were
9 being conducted by means other than a mail ballot election.

10 2. "Return verification envelope" means an envelope that
11 contains a secrecy envelope and which is designed to allow
12 election officials, upon examination of the outside of the
13 envelope, to determine that the ballot is being submitted by
14 someone who is in fact a registered voter and who has not
15 already voted.

16 3. "Secrecy envelope" means an envelope used to contain
17 the elector's ballot and that is designed to conceal the
18 voter's vote and to prevent the voter's ballot from being
19 distinguished from the ballots of other voters.

20 Sec. 3. NEW SECTION. 49B.3 MAIL BALLOT ELECTION
21 PROCEDURE.

22 The state commissioner of elections shall prescribe uniform
23 procedures and forms to be used in the conduct of mail ballot
24 elections.

25 Sec. 4. NEW SECTION. 49B.4 INITIATION BY GOVERNING BODY.

26 1. The city council of a city may, by resolution, request
27 that the county commissioner of elections conduct the regular
28 city election or a special city election under this chapter.
29 Only a city with two hundred or fewer registered voters at the
30 time the resolution is adopted may make such a request. The
31 council must file the resolution with the county commissioner
32 not later than ninety days before the date of the election.
33 The commissioner shall approve the request if the commissioner
34 determines that it is economically and administratively
35 feasible to conduct the regular city election or a special

1 city election by mail.

2 2. After the resolution is approved, the county
3 commissioner shall prepare a written plan for conduct of the
4 election as provided in section 49B.5. At least seventy-one
5 days before the date set for the election, the county
6 commissioner shall forward a copy of the written plan to the
7 city council concerned.

8 Sec. 5. NEW SECTION. 49B.5 WRITTEN PLAN FOR CONDUCT OF
9 ELECTION -- AMENDMENTS -- APPROVAL PROCEDURE.

10 1. The county commissioner shall prepare a written plan,
11 including a timetable, for the conduct of a mail ballot
12 election and shall submit it to the state commissioner of
13 elections at least seventy-one days before the date of the
14 election.

15 2. The plan may be amended by the county commissioner any
16 time before the sixty-fourth day before the date of the
17 election by notifying the state commissioner of elections in
18 writing of any changes.

19 3. Within five days after receiving the plan, and as soon
20 as possible after receiving any amendments, the state
21 commissioner of elections shall approve, disapprove, or
22 recommend changes to the plan or amendments. The final plan
23 shall be approved and available to the public at least two
24 days before the deadline for candidates to file nomination
25 papers in the office of the city clerk.

26 4. When the written plan has been approved, the county
27 commissioner shall proceed to conduct the election according
28 to the approved plan.

29 Sec. 6. NEW SECTION. 49B.6 PUBLICATION OF NOTICE.

30 The county commissioner shall, not more than ten days and
31 not less than four days before the date that ballots are to be
32 mailed, publish notice that a mail ballot election will be
33 conducted. The notice shall be published in a newspaper of
34 general circulation in each city for which the mail ballot
35 election will be conducted. The notice shall include all of

1 the following information:

2 1. The date ballots will be mailed.

3 2. The last day that a voter can request an absentee
4 ballot.

5 3. Voter registration deadlines.

6 4. Location or locations where mail ballots can be
7 deposited pursuant to section 49B.13.

8 5. Instructions for obtaining a replacement ballot if a
9 voter's ballot is destroyed, spoiled, lost, or not received
10 pursuant to section 49B.9.

11 The county commissioner is not required to publish a sample
12 ballot.

13 Sec. 7. NEW SECTION. 49B.7 MAILING BALLOTS.

14 1. Official ballots for a mail ballot election shall be
15 prepared and all other initial procedures for elections shall
16 be followed as otherwise provided by law.

17 2. The county commissioner of elections shall mail an
18 official ballot to every registered voter of the city
19 conducting the election on a date not sooner than the
20 twentieth day before the date of the election and not later
21 than the tenth day before the date of the election. An
22 exception shall be made for those ballots delivered as
23 prescribed in section 49B.12.

24 3. All ballots shall be mailed by first class mail.

25 4. Ballots mailed by the county commissioner shall be
26 addressed to the address of each voter appearing in the
27 registration records of the city, and placed in an envelope
28 which is prominently marked "Do Not Forward".

29 5. The ballot shall contain the following warning:

30 "Any person who, by use of violence, threats of violence,
31 or any means of duress, procures the vote of a voter for or
32 against any measure or candidate is subject, upon conviction,
33 to imprisonment or to a fine, or both."

34 Sec. 8. NEW SECTION. 49B.8 REGISTRATION.

35 The county commissioner shall not mail a ballot under this

1 chapter to any voter not registered thirty days before the
2 date of the election. Voters registered less than thirty days
3 before the date of the election, but before the close of
4 registration, may apply for a ballot under section 49B.9.

5 Sec. 9. NEW SECTION. 49B.9 REPLACEMENT BALLOTS.

6 If the mail ballot is destroyed, spoiled, lost, or not
7 received by the voter, the voter may obtain a replacement
8 ballot from the county commissioner as provided in this
9 section. A voter seeking a replacement ballot shall sign a
10 statement, on a form prescribed by the state commissioner,
11 that the ballot was destroyed, spoiled, lost, or not received.
12 The voter or the voter's designee shall deliver the statement
13 to the county commissioner before noon on the date of the
14 election. The voter may mail the statement to the county
15 commissioner. However, a county commissioner shall not
16 transmit a ballot by mail under this section unless the
17 statement is received before five p.m. on the fourth day
18 before the date of the election. When a statement is timely
19 received under this section, the county commissioner shall
20 give the ballot to the voter if the voter is present in the
21 office of the county commissioner, or promptly mail the ballot
22 to the voter at the address contained in the statement, except
23 when prohibited by this section. If the voter is present in
24 the county commissioner's office, the ballot shall be voted at
25 that time. The county commissioner shall keep a record of
26 each replacement ballot provided under this section. If a
27 voter, having received and voted a replacement ballot as
28 provided under this section, later finds the lost ballot, the
29 voter shall return the lost ballot to the county commissioner.

30 Sec. 10. NEW SECTION. 49B.10 VOTING AND RETURN OF
31 BALLOT.

32 1. A registered voter, upon receipt of a mail ballot,
33 shall mark the ballot in such a manner that no other person
34 will know how the ballot is marked and shall place it in the
35 secrecy envelope provided with the ballot.

1 A voter who is blind, cannot read, or because of a physical
2 disability is unable to mark the ballot, may be assisted by
3 any person selected by the voter.

4 2. The voter shall place the secrecy envelope containing
5 the ballot in the return verification envelope and sign and
6 securely seal the return verification envelope. The sealed
7 return verification envelope shall be returned to the county
8 commissioner by one of the following methods:

9 a. The sealed return verification envelope may be
10 delivered by the registered voter or the voter's designee to
11 the county commissioner's office or a place designated by the
12 commissioner no later than the time the polls close on
13 election day.

14 b. The sealed return verification envelope may be mailed,
15 postage paid, to the county commissioner. In order for the
16 ballot to be counted, the return verification envelope must be
17 clearly postmarked by an officially authorized postal service
18 not later than the day before the election and received by the
19 county commissioner not later than the time established for
20 the canvass by the board of supervisors for that election.
21 The county commissioner shall contact the post office serving
22 the county commissioner's office at the latest practical hour
23 before the canvass by the board of supervisors for that
24 election, and shall arrange for return verification envelopes
25 received in that post office but not yet delivered to the
26 commissioner's office to be brought to the commissioner's
27 office before the canvass for that election by the board of
28 supervisors.

29 Sec. 11. NEW SECTION. 49B.11 ABSENTEE BALLOTS.

30 1. A registered voter who will be absent from the city
31 during the time when the ballots are mailed may do either of
32 the following:

33 a. Vote in person in the county commissioner's office as
34 soon as ballots are available and until noon the day before
35 the ballots are scheduled to be mailed.

1 b. Make a written request, signed by the voter and
2 addressed to the county commissioner, that the ballot be
3 mailed to an address other than that which appears on the
4 voter's registration record. Written requests shall be
5 accepted until noon the day before the ballots are scheduled
6 to be mailed.

7 2. Ballots mailed to voters pursuant to this section shall
8 be mailed the same day that all other ballots are mailed.

9 Sec. 12. NEW SECTION. 49B.12 BALLOTING BY CONFINED
10 PERSONS.

11 A person who is a resident or patient in a health care
12 facility or hospital located in the county in which the
13 election is to be held shall not be mailed a ballot but shall
14 have a ballot delivered in the manner prescribed by section
15 53.22, subsection 1.

16 Sec. 13. NEW SECTION. 49B.13 PERSONAL DELIVERY OF MAIL
17 BALLOT -- BALLOT DROPOFF STATIONS.

18 A ballot dropoff station for the deposit of mail ballots
19 may be established in the city conducting the mail ballot
20 election at the direction of the county commissioner. A
21 ballot dropoff station established at the direction of the
22 commissioner shall be open from eight a.m. until five p.m. on
23 the day of the election.

24 Sec. 14. NEW SECTION. 49B.14 RECEIPT OF BALLOT --
25 SIGNATURE VERIFICATION.

26 When a mail ballot is returned, the county commissioner, or
27 the county commissioner's designees, shall first examine the
28 return verification envelope to determine whether it was
29 submitted by a registered voter who has not previously voted.
30 A ballot shall be counted only if it is returned in the return
31 verification envelope, the envelope is signed by the voter to
32 whom the ballot is issued, and the signature has been verified
33 as provided in this section.

34 The county commissioner or the county commissioner's
35 designees shall verify the signature of each voter on the

1 return verification envelope with the signature in the voter's
2 registration records and may commence verification at any time
3 before election day. If a voter to whom a replacement ballot
4 has been issued under section 49B.9 returns more than one
5 ballot, only the replacement ballot shall be counted.

6 If the voter's signature is verified and the ballot is
7 otherwise valid, the county commissioner or the county
8 commissioner's designees shall deposit the ballot unopened in
9 an official ballot box.

10 Sec. 15. NEW SECTION. 49B.15 PROCEDURE FOR INVALID
11 BALLOTS.

12 If the county commissioner is not convinced that the
13 individual who signed the return verification envelope is the
14 voter whose name appears on the registration card, the county
15 commissioner shall not deposit the ballot in a ballot box but
16 shall do all of the following:

17 1. Give notice to the voter as follows:

18 a. As soon as possible after receipt of a voter's ballot,
19 give notice to the voter, either by telephone or by first
20 class mail, if the county commissioner is unable to verify the
21 voter's signature.

22 b. Inform the voter that the voter may appear in person at
23 the county commissioner's office before the close of the polls
24 on election day and verify the signature.

25 2. Permit any voter appearing pursuant to subsection 1,
26 paragraph "b", to:

27 a. Verify the voter's signature, after proof of
28 identification, by affirming that the signature is in fact the
29 voter's or by completing a new registration card containing
30 the voter's current signature.

31 b. If necessary, request and receive a replacement ballot
32 and vote at that time.

33 3. If the discrepancy is not rectified to the county
34 commissioner's satisfaction, present the unopened envelope and
35 the registration card to the special precinct election board

1 for a determination. If the election board is unable to
2 resolve the issue to its satisfaction, the ballot shall not be
3 counted.

4 Sec. 16. NEW SECTION. 49B.16 COUNTING BALLOTS.

5 Mail ballots shall be counted in the manner prescribed by
6 section 53.23 for absentee ballots. The county commissioner
7 shall supervise the procedures for the handling, counting, and
8 canvassing of ballots to ensure the safety and confidentiality
9 of all ballots.

10 Sec. 17. NEW SECTION. 49B.17 CHALLENGES.

11 Votes cast pursuant to this chapter may be challenged in
12 the manner prescribed by section 53.31 for absentee ballots.

13 Sec. 18. NEW SECTION. 49B.18 CANVASS OF VOTES.

14 The provisions of chapter 50 relating to canvass of votes
15 apply to this chapter only to the extent they do not conflict
16 with this chapter.

17 Sec. 19. NEW SECTION. 49B.19 OTHER LAWS.

18 All laws which apply to elections apply to mail ballot
19 elections held under this chapter to the extent applicable.

20 Sec. 20. NEW SECTION. 49B.20 RULES.

21 The state commissioner of elections shall adopt rules
22 pursuant to chapter 17A to govern the procedures and forms
23 necessary to implement this chapter. The authority of the
24 state commissioner to adopt rules under this chapter shall be
25 liberally construed.

26 Sec. 21. NEW SECTION. 49B.21 MISCONDUCT -- VIOLATIONS --
27 PENALTIES.

28 1. A person who, by use of violence, threats of violence,
29 or any means of duress, procures or endeavors to procure the
30 vote of a voter for or against any measure or candidate
31 commits an aggravated misdemeanor.

32 2. A person who violates or attempts to violate any
33 provision or requirement of this chapter for which a penalty
34 is not otherwise provided commits a simple misdemeanor.

35 Sec. 22. Section 39.3, Code 2001, is amended by adding the

1 following new subsection:

2 NEW SUBSECTION. 8A. "Mail ballot election" means an
3 election conducted pursuant to chapter 49B.

4 EXPLANATION

5 This bill creates a new Code chapter 49B and establishes a
6 procedure for elections in cities with 200 or fewer registered
7 voters to be conducted by mailed ballots. To qualify for this
8 method of election, the city council must adopt a resolution
9 not later than 90 days before the date of the election
10 requesting that the county commissioner of elections conduct
11 the regular city election or special city election as a mail
12 ballot election. The election must be conducted pursuant to a
13 plan proposed by the county commissioner of elections (county
14 auditor) and approved by the state commissioner of elections
15 (secretary of state).

16 The bill requires the county commissioner to mail the
17 ballots to registered voters in the city no more than 20 days
18 and no less than 10 days before the date of the election. To
19 receive a mailed ballot, an elector must be registered to vote
20 30 or more days before the date of the election. A completed
21 ballot must be personally delivered to the commissioner's
22 office or a designated place no later than the time the polls
23 close on election day or must be postmarked no later than the
24 day before the election and received by the commissioner not
25 later than the date set for canvassing the ballots.

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