

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

BILL: SB 1950

SPONSOR: Senator Jones

SUBJECT: Voter Registration/High Schools

DATE: April 6, 2001

REVISED: 04/11/01

| | ANALYST | STAFF DIRECTOR | REFERENCE | ACTION |
|----|---------|----------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1. | Fox | Bradshaw | EE | Fav/1 amendment |
| 2. | | | ED | |
| 3. | | | AED | |
| 4. | | | AP | |
| 5. | | | | |
| 6. | | | | |

I. Summary:

Senate Bill 1950 requires each school district to establish a voter registration program in all public high schools providing students over 17 years of age the opportunity to register to vote, or update a registration, at least once a year.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2001.

This bill creates section 97.0584 of the Florida Statutes, and re-enacts sections 97.041 and 97.053(5), to incorporate cross references.

II. Present Situation:

Florida law requires that in order to be eligible to vote, a person must be:

- At least 18 years of age;
- A citizen of the United States;
- A legal resident of the State of Florida;
- A legal resident of the county in which that person seeks to be registered; and
- Registered to vote pursuant to the Florida Election Code.¹

A person who has been adjudicated mentally incompetent or a person who has been convicted of any felony by any court of record may not vote until restoration of civil rights or removal of the disability.²

¹ Section 97.041, F.S.

² Art. VI, Section 4, Fla. Const.

An otherwise qualified person may “pre-register” to vote after that person’s 17th birthday, and may vote in any election occurring after his or her 18th birthday.³

In order to register to vote, a person must fill out a voter registration application and submit it to the supervisor of elections in the county of his or her residence. With the implementation of the National Voter Registration Act in 1995, registration forms are now widely available in a variety of locations. A person may register to vote at:

- the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, while applying for or renewing a driver’s license or identification card;
- any office that provides public assistance;⁴
- any office that serves persons with disabilities;
- any center for independent living;
- any qualifying educational institution;⁵
- any public library; or
- any armed forces recruitment office.

In addition to these required locations, each supervisor of elections may make applications available at other locations in the county. Additionally, private groups hold registration drives where a person may pick up a registration form and mail it to the supervisor of elections.

Finally, the Department of State provides an on-line registration application which may be filled out and electronically submitted to the Department. Upon receipt of an on-line registration application, the Department of State prints out the form and sends it to the prospective voter for the voter to sign and send to his or her county supervisor of elections.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Senate Bill 1950 requires each school district to establish a voter registration program in all public high schools providing students over 17 years of age the opportunity to register (or “pre-register”) to vote, or update a registration, at least once a year. The bill mandates a spring voter registration drive. The school conducts a review of the registration applications for completeness, and forwards them to the supervisor of elections.

The bill also establishes certain target registration goals for each school based on the number of eligible students enrolled in the school’s American Government or Economics classes as of April 10.

The supervisor of elections is required to provide the necessary registration forms and materials and to assist the schools as necessary to carry out the program. For the purpose of familiarizing

³ 97.041(1)(b), F.S.

⁴ Assistance provided through the food stamp program, the Medicaid program, the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children, and the WAGES Program. Section 97.021(22), F.S.

⁵ Any public or private educational institution receiving state financial assistance which has as its primary mission providing education or training to students 18 years of age or older, which has 200 students, and whose student government organization has requested this designation for voter registration. Section 97.021(24), F.S.

students with the county's voting system, each school is also required to arrange for the use of the county's voting equipment in any high school election in which only students are candidates --- provided it does not conflict with other scheduled elections.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2001.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The supervisors of elections may incur some nominal costs in providing registration materials and voting equipment to schools.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

There is a conflict in the scope of the proposed voter registration program. Section 97.0584(1)(a) states that the voter registration program must provide "every eligible student" an opportunity to register or update a registration once a year. Section 97.0584(3)(a) limits participation in the program to students in American Government or Economics classes, provided a target number of new registrants can be met. If the target is not met, then students in another social science class may participate in the program. Only if the target goal is still not met may every other eligible student participate. Staff recommends removing the language in section 97.0584(3)(a) restricting participation in the voter registration program, while maintaining the target registration goal language.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Amendments:

#1 by Ethics and Elections:

Clarifying amendment; corrects the technical deficiency noted in Section VI of this analysis by insuring that every student who is qualified to register or pre-register will have an opportunity to participate in the voter registration program.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's sponsor or the Florida Senate.
