

SUBJECT: Expanding program allowing overseas military to vote by e-ballot

COMMITTEE: Elections — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Laubenberg, Israel, R. Anderson, Fallon, Reynolds, Swanson

0 nays

1 absent — Larson

WITNESSES: For — Jacquelyn Callanen, Bexar County; Morgan Little, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations; Glen Maxey, Texas Democratic Party; Bill Fairbrother, TRCCA; (*Registered, but did not testify*); Melissa Shannon, County of Bexar Commissioners Court; Charles Reed, Dallas County Commissioners Court; Ed Johnson, Harris County Clerk's Office; Cinde Weatherby, League of Women Voters of Texas; Juan Antonio Flores, San Antonio Chamber of Commerce; Mark Mendez, Tarrant County; Chris Davis and John Oldham, Texas Association of Elections Administrators; Donald Lee, Texas Conference of Urban Counties; Nikole Sturm, Travis County Green Party; Jacob Aronowitz, Young Active Labor Leaders; Elizabeth Garcia; Sacha Jacobson; Dyana Limon-Mercado)

Against — None

On — Alan Vera, Harris County Republican Party Ballot Security Committee; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Keith Ingram, Texas Secretary of State, Elections Division)

BACKGROUND: In 2013, through the enactment of HB 1129 by White, the 83rd Legislature established a pilot program allowing overseas active duty military personnel eligible for hostile fire pay to return an early voting ballot by email. The law requires the secretary of state to determine a number of willing counties that wish to participate in the program and have the appropriate technological capabilities.

The pilot program was extended for two years in 2015 and is scheduled to

end on September 1, 2017. Some observers have suggested the program be extended for the continued benefit of overseas active-duty personnel who might otherwise face challenges voting by absentee ballot.

DIGEST: CSHB 1414 would extend the program allowing certain overseas military members to vote by email until September 1, 2021, and remove its designation as a pilot program. The bill would allow the secretary of state to expand the program to any county that desired to participate and had the appropriate technological capabilities.

By January 1, 2021, the secretary of state would file a report with the Legislature containing recommendations about the program and suggestions for making it permanent.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2017.

NOTES: A companion bill, SB 752 by Campbell, was approved by the Senate on April 19 and referred to the House Committee on Elections on April 28.