

ABSENT VOTER SIGNATURE TRAINING

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Senate Bill 308 (S-1) as passed by the Senate

Sponsor: Sen. Kevin Daley

House Committee: Elections and Ethics

Senate Committee: Elections

Complete to 2-28-22

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

Senate Bill 308 would amend the Michigan Election Law to require the secretary of state to promulgate rules to establish a process for verifying the signatures of absent voters. The rules would have to be developed in consultation with handwriting experts and meet other criteria described below, and the process would have to be used to train county, city, and township clerks.

Currently, among other responsibilities, the secretary of state must issue rules and instructions for conducting elections and voter registrations, advise local election officials on proper election methods, investigate violations, and conduct training of election officials.

The bill would additionally require the secretary of state to promulgate rules for an objective signature verification process, to establish signature verification training that complies with those rules, and to require all county, city, and township clerks to undergo that training.

The secretary of state would have to consult with appropriate handwriting experts in promulgating the rules described above. The signature verification process would have to focus solely on the objective criteria clerks need to determine whether a signature submitted on an absent voter ballot application or return envelope is genuine, based on whether that signature agrees sufficiently with the individual's signature on the master card or digitized signature in the qualified voter file. The bill would prohibit the process from including any of the following:

- A presumption regarding the validity of a signature to be verified.
- Instructions or guidance to accept a signature as valid if it has any redeeming qualities.
- Instructions or guidance to consider hypothetical or circumstantial factors that may affect a signature if there is no supporting information provided through contact with the voter or through other factual grounds.

MCL 168.31

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Department of State would incur costs as a result of establishing and implementing signature verification training for all county, city, and township clerks. It is not yet known what personnel or material resources and costs would be required to develop and provide ongoing training opportunities for clerks, but they would potentially exceed ongoing appropriations to the Bureau of Elections, which would support these costs.

Additionally, there may be minor one-time costs associated with the bill's requirement to consult with handwriting experts when promulgating rules to establish a signature verification process that would likely be supported with ongoing appropriations.

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