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Senate State Government Committee

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Bill Summary
Senate Bill 1255, Printer's Number 1548
Prime Sponsor: Robbins

A. Synopsis:

Amends the Election Code to enact the Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act.

B. Bill Analysis:

Senate Bill 1255 amends the election code to enact the Uniform Military and Overseas Voters Act to simplify the process of absentee voting for United States military and overseas civilians in State elections.

This legislation applies to federal and state primary, municipal, general and special elections conducted in the Commonwealth. The Secretary of the Commonwealth is responsible for implementing the provisions of the act which include establishing an electronic transmission system through which a covered voter may apply for and receive voter registration materials and military-overseas ballots and developing standardized absentee-voting materials and their electronic equivalents.

Allows a covered voter to use the Federal postcard application to register to vote and apply for a military-overseas ballot at the same time.

Allows uniformed service members their spouses and dependents and bedridden veterans to use the Federal write-in absentee ballot to register to vote, apply for an absentee ballot and vote at the same time.

Provides that an application for a military-overseas ballot for a primary election shall be considered a standing request for a military-overseas ballot for a special election, a general election, or a municipal election, occurring in the same calendar year as the primary.

A County board of election shall provide an opportunity for each covered voter who registers to vote after the effective date of this section to furnish the county with an email address. The email address provided may only be used for official communication with the voter about the voting process, including transmitting overseas ballots and ballot materials, if the voter has requested electronic transmission.

A covered voter may request that a ballot and balloting materials be sent to the voter by mail or by internet.

To be valid, a military-overseas ballot must be received by the appropriate County election board not later than the close of polls or the voter must submit the ballot for mailing no later than midnight at the place where the voter completed the ballot on the date immediately preceding the date of the election.

A voter may use a Federal write-in absentee ballot to vote for all offices and ballot measures in an election.

Requires the Secretary of the Commonwealth to implement an electronic free-access system by which a covered voter may determine by telephone, e-mail or Internet website whether:

- The voter's Federal postcard application or other registration or military-overseas ballot application has been received and accepted; and
- The voter's military over-seas ballot has been received and the current status of the ballot.

Requires County boards of elections to prepare election notices at least 90 days prior to an election, keep them updated and make them available on their publicly accessible website if they have one.

Prohibits invalidating a document by a covered voter because of the voter's mistake or omission as long as the mistake or omission does not prevent determining whether a covered voter is eligible to vote.

This legislation shall apply to elections which occur after January 1, 2013. Section 3514 shall apply to elections following a date to be determined by the Department of State and which shall be published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin.