

Bill, Policy Changes Would Increase Voter Registration

Viola bill would allow eligible Delawareans to register to vote on Election Day

DOVER – Lawmakers and the Markell Administration unveiled proposals Tuesday designed to increase voter turnout and encourage more Delawareans to register to vote.

House Majority Whip Rep. John Viola introduced legislation that would make Delaware the 12th state to allow Election Day registration, which permits eligible residents to register to vote and cast their ballots on the same day. Same-day registration is credited with significantly increasing voter turnout. States that allow same-day registration have a voter turnout that is on average 10 percent higher than states that do not.

“Our goal as a society should be to encourage more people to be part of the electoral process, not less,” said Rep. Viola, D-Newark. “Right now, we have an arbitrary deadline to register to vote of three weeks before an election. Let’s face it: Some people, often young people or those who just moved, don’t think to register to vote until it’s right before the election, and by then it’s too late. Election Day registration has been around for decades and is proven to safely and effectively increase voter turnout, so it’s time for Delaware to take this step forward.”

Under House Bill 105, a person would be able to register to vote at his or her polling place on the day of a presidential or state primary or general or special election by showing a valid government-issued photo identification card, current utility bill, bank statement, paycheck or other government

document displaying the name and address of the person registering to vote. Those are the same criteria required for a person registering to vote under current Delaware law.

Rep. Viola said several states that already have same-day registration use different safeguards to ensure voter integrity, such as using non-forwardable mailings to purge the registration list or requiring Election-Day registrants to swear an affidavit that they are not registered to vote. State Elections Commissioner Elaine Manlove said the Department of Elections already uses both methods and would implement both processes for same-day registrants.

Unlike mail-in registration, Rep. Viola noted that this bill would require voters to swear to their identity in person. A person who falsely registers to vote could face a fine of up to \$200 and a prison sentence between 30 days and two years.

Governor Jack Markell declared his support for the Election Day registration bill Tuesday and unveiled a complementary package of administration initiatives to encourage citizen participation in Delaware elections. Gov. Markell announced that Delaware will make it possible for citizens to register to vote online and will expand its successful eSignature electronic voter registration system.

“The right to vote is fundamental,” Gov. Markell said. “Delawareans deserve a modern, accessible, and efficient voter registration system. In today’s world of online shopping and one-stop shopping, online and same-day registration just makes sense.”

Today, Delaware voters can fill out a voter registration form online, but they must print and submit the form by mail or deliver it to an elections office by hand. Delaware’s new online registration system will enable citizens to complete the registration process online.

Delaware’s eSignature system is currently in use at Division

of Motor Vehicle (DMV) offices up and down the state, where it enables citizens to register to vote or update their registration information at the same time that they obtain or update their driver's licenses. Expanded eSignature will make it possible for citizens to register to vote or update their registration information when they access services of the Department of Health and Social Services or the Department of Labor through those agencies' websites.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, same-day registration has existed in Maine, Minnesota and Wisconsin since the mid-1970s. Since then, eight other states and the District of Columbia have adopted same-day registration, and more than a dozen other states are contemplating similar laws.

HB 105 has been assigned to the House Administration Committee.

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