

## **Return Postage Paid Ballots**

Mr. Chairman, members of the council,

For the record, I am Kim Wyman, Washington Secretary of State, here today to testify on the proposed ordinance 2018-0183 to require King County to pay for the return postage of mail-in ballots.

I commend you, the council and Julie Wise for taking on this issue. This is another great example of Julie being at the forefront of elections issues and why she is an outstanding Director of Elections.

I have always supported initiatives that increase voter access and turnout. For example, this last legislative session, I supported the implementation of automatic voter registration, pre-registering 16- and 17-year-olds . . . and legislation proposed by Sen. Hasegawa that would have implemented pre-paid postage statewide (SB 5019).

When it comes to pre-paid postage, I believe two components are necessary – one, that it be implemented statewide; and two, that it cover every election. The reason for this is that it's important we treat every voter in the state fairly and equally and that we do not create confusion among voters about how they can participate.

That's why I have also been working with a member of our congressional delegation to explore federal legislation to allow for pre-paid ballot return to address the challenges of getting a postmark on such ballots.

I have some recommendations I want to make to the council as you consider this ordinance.

The reality is, while this decision may appear to only affect King County voters, it has a statewide impact on the remaining 38 counties.

For the fall 2018 elections, we will have one statewide race (US Senate), the potential for one or more statewide ballot initiatives, possible advisory votes, 10 congressional districts and 49 legislative districts on the ballot, along with county and local races and issues.

With 1.2 million registered voters, King County accounts for about one third of our state's 4.2 million registered voters. Further, in August and November, there will be races in five legislative districts (1, 30, 31, 32 and 39) and two congressional districts (1 and 8) in King County, which also cross into one or more other counties.

This decision should not be made in a vacuum because the impacts will not remain in a vacuum.

First, this could create confusion with voters in the shared media market who will not receive prepaid postage.

My interest with this proposed ordinance is when it comes to returning a ballot to the county elections office, that voters in King County will be treated differently in the upcoming primary and general elections than voters in the remaining 38 counties.

Unfortunately, many, if not most of the other 38 counties don't have ability to pay for return postage in their fall elections.

We have a number of distressed counties who are facing significant budget reductions this year. I know of at least two county auditor's offices who have received 6-12% cuts to their budgets in the past couple of months.

If the council delays this decision, I ask you to join me in going to the Legislature and asking them to fund the cost of prepaid ballot return postage for the entire state for all elections. Bipartisan legislation is already being proposed by Sens. Mullet and Fain.

If the council approves this ordinance, I ask this council to join me in asking Gov. Inslee to give my office the emergency spending authority to reimburse all 39 counties, including King County, for the return postage costs for the 2018 Primary and General elections. This is estimated to be \$622,602 in the Primary and \$1,156,261 in the General, for a total of \$1,778,863.

This becomes an emergency because the counties need to immediately begin printing return ballot envelopes for the fall elections.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this issue and I am happy to answer questions.