

Indiana Republicans drop effort to require paper ballots for voting machines by 2024

- By J.D. Davidson | The Center Square 1/26/2022



(The Center Square) – In a committee meeting this week, Republican legislators dropped provisions from an election bill that would have required counties to have voting machines with paper ballot backups by 2024.

House Bill 1116 had passed out of the House Committee on Elections and Apportionment with bipartisan support last week. It would have required counties have paper ballot backups for at least 10% of all voting machines by 2022, and for all of them by July 1, 2024, before the next presidential election.

But an amendment was introduced by Republicans in the House Ways and Means Committee on Tuesday to remove all language dealing with voting machines, with the chairman of the committee, Rep. Tim Brown, R-Crawfordsville, saying they wanted to remove everything that would have a “fiscal impact” on counties.

Rep. Ed Delaney, D-Indianapolis decried the move, saying various counties made a “terrible decision” over the years to buy voting machines with no paper ballot backups, calling the machines “dangerous.”

“These are the single greatest threat to voter integrity in the state of Indiana and they have been since the day people bought those touch screens that didn’t have a paper trail,” he said.

The machines with no paper trail are a type of voting machine called DRE (direct recording electronic) devices. The DRE machines in use in Indiana are produced and serviced by the MicroVote General Corp., based in Indianapolis. They are used in 58 of 92 Indiana counties, making Indiana one of just five states in which a majority of voters in the 2020 election were living in counties using voting machines with no paper ballot backups.

In 2019, the Indiana General Assembly passed a law requiring all counties have voting machines with a paper audit trail by 2029, and Republican legislators have resisted calls from Democrats and voter integrity advocates to move this date up – until this month when the chairman of the House Committee on Elections and Apportionment, Rep. Timothy Wesco, R-Osceola, introduced HB 1116, which would have required that counties using the MicroVote machines have attachments called VVPAT (voter verified paper audit trail) printers for at least 10% of all voting machines by 2022, and have VVPAT printers for all voting machines by July 1, 2024.

Brown announced the voting machine provision was being taken out of the bill because of its “fiscal impact” on counties, which would have had to spend their own funds to either replace the MicroVote voting machines, or buy VVPAT printers for all of them.

One witness, Dave Waters, testified before the committee, saying he didn’t trust the MicroVote machines and asked legislators to use some of the state’s \$5 billion surplus to give counties interest-free loans so they could replace them right away, rather than over the next several years.

“You know, the lack of creativity is astonishing,” he said. “My vote is valuable and I want a system that protects that value.”

The vote on the amendment to remove the language on voting machines from the bill fell along party lines, with all Republicans voting for it, and all Democrats against.

With the voting machine provision taken out, other provisions were added from another bill, and HB1116 became about absentee voting – specifically, asking someone who is requesting an absentee ballot to check a box affirming they are voting absentee because they cannot vote in person on election day or for the entire early voting period.

“We’re clarifying that if you can vote in person, then it would be the policy of the state of Indiana...that we would encourage you to vote in person if you’re able to vote in person,” said Wesco, in explaining the reason for the language.

Indiana does not have no-excuse mail voting. Instead, state law allows people to vote absentee for 11 different reasons, including a “reasonable expectation” that they will be out of the county on election day.

HB 1116 would change the law to say that in order to vote absentee using this reason, a voter must affirm that he or she expects to be out of the county, not only on election day, but also for the entire 28-day early voting period before election day. He or she would also have to affirm that if voting absentee because they are confined due to illness or injury, it must be that they are confined not only on election day, but also for the entire 28-day early voting period.

The same would apply to those wanting to vote absentee because of work. Voters would have to affirm that they are unable to vote in-person because they are scheduled to work at their regular place of employment during the entire early voting period and also on election day. Current law refers only to election day.

The bill would also require anyone accessing the online form to request an absentee ballot provide either their driver’s license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number.

HB 1116 was passed out of the Ways and Means Committee and was read on the House floor on Tuesday evening.

It is expected to be voted on by the full House next week.



J.D. Davidson

Regional Editor

An Ohio native, J.D. Davidson is a veteran journalist with more than 30 years of experience in newspapers in Ohio, Georgia, Alabama and Texas. He has served as a reporter, editor, managing editor and publisher.