

HB 26 -- PRIMARY ELECTIONS

SPONSOR: Stacy

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Elections and Elected Officials by a vote of 5 to 3.

Beginning January 1, 2022, this bill allows established political parties to use a state funded, closed political primary system conducted by local election authorities. The local election authority will allow registration of voters as members of a particular political party and enforce time limits on registration or changing political parties as specified in the bill. The Secretary of State shall maintain voter registration records and party affiliation and provide such information back to local election authorities as specified in the bill. If the state funded closed primary system is not employed, then political parties may submit candidates chosen by caucus or some other method paid for by the political party for a general election to the requisite election authority.

Persons not previously registered to vote in Missouri may choose a party affiliation and register to vote until the fourth Wednesday prior to a primary election. Independent candidates must be unaffiliated with a political party no later than the 23rd Tuesday before any candidate filing opening date preceding a political primary election in order to run for office. Political party candidates must be affiliated with their party no later than the 23rd week prior to the last Tuesday in February. Any candidates selected by nominating committees must be affiliated with the requisite political party no later than 23 weeks prior to the date of selection.

This bill establishes the "Integrity in Political Party Voting Act." The state shall pay the costs of implementing and providing notice of the closed primary system. Local election authorities shall notify registered voters of the primary election system using current notices mailed to voters and party affiliation changes will be noted beginning January 1, 2025. The voter registration application form will allow an initial choice of party affiliation during the presidential primary, August primary, or general election. Political affiliation or unaffiliation can be changed at any time except if the change occurs within the 23 weeks preceding any political party primary election, at which time the change will not take effect until after the current political party primary held. Deadlines for implementation is January 1, 2025.

The closed primary system applies to the presidential primary as well as other state and federal races (Section 115.628, RSMo).

This bill is the same as HB 1258 (2020).

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the bill clearly separates primary and general elections by allowing private political parties to choose their own candidates. General elections will still allow all voters to participate in deciding who will serve in office. Open primary elections are susceptible to gaming and crossover voting in which individuals hostile to a particular party attempt to choose its least electable candidate for the general election. The use of social media may increase the opportunity to engage in strategic voting. Primary political party registration will encourage more people to register to vote and help remove non-voters from rolls. Open primaries amount to disenfranchisement of political party stalwarts who are active participants in a political party.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Stacy; Ania Cool; Annette Sieve; Brenda Woodrell; United for Missouri; Carole Zumwalt; Cheryl Bohl; Cheryl S Gross; Cindy A. Horn; Clif Ehlen; Dagmar Wood; Dan Sexson; Darlene; Delmar Mills; Derrick R Good; Donna Ortner; Ed Martin, Phyllis Schlafly Eagles; Fay Owsley; Gerald Wistrand; Gina Allen; Ginger Yoak; Gwen Wadell; Haven Howard; James Timothy Rooney; Jane Louise Scheckel; Janet Dabbs; Jason Sears; Jennifer Gore; Jerome S. Jacobsmeyer; Jim Conrady; John Moore; Judith Hon; Judith Moorefield; Judy Sofka; Juli Ward; Kathy Forck; Linda J Yeager; Linda Vardell; Lorna Ruth Piper; Marjie Saiter; Marjorie; Marykathryn Victor; Michael Hilbert; Mike R Moorefield; Mitchell Schubert; Nancy Jones; Nicole Olszewski; Nir Regev; Paula Juelich; Peggy Gilkey; Richard W Mckie; Rita Stevenson; Ron Cawood; Sandra Eno; Victor McCance; Abby Olson; Charles Dalton, Missouri Republican Party; Jordan Henry, Phyllis Schlafly Eagles; Briana Koertner; Don; Nick Myers, Missouri Republican Party; David Woody; Cheryl Thornton; Joanna K Boyer; Linda Niendick; Richard H Hollowood; Jonathan Prouty; Kay Hoflander; Larry G. Berry; Nola Wood, Jackson County Republican Committee; Peggy Crabtree Berry; Ray Rehder; Ron Staggs; and Steven W. Hinton.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that the bill will prevent many ordinary voters from voting in local races where they typically favor friends and family members in their community and do not care about political party affiliation. It could lead to low voter turnout and confusion in many areas where elections are uncontested. Many independent voters prefer to have a choice of candidates on primary election day. It would be difficult for election judges to explain unaffiliated ballot processes, and in some cases there may be nothing on the ballot for independents and others desiring not to affiliate with a political party.

Testifying against the bill were Angie Curley; Arnie C. Dienoff; Paul Leykamp; Susan Gibson; Missouri Association of County Clerks and Election Authorities; and Sherry Parks, Livingston County.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.