

SUBJECT:	Providing the reason a voter registration application was rejected
COMMITTEE:	Elections —favorable, without amendment
VOTE:	6 ayes — Morrison, Miles, Klick, R. Miller, Simmons, Wu 0 nays 1 absent — Johnson
WITNESSES:	<p>For — Sondra Haltom, Empower the Vote Texas; Glen Maxey, Texas Democratic Party; Jill Moffitt, Harris County Democratic Party; (<i>Registered, but did not testify</i>: Yannis Banks, Texas NAACP)</p> <p>Against — Ed Johnson, Harris County Tax Office; (<i>Registered, but did not testify</i>: B R “Skipper” Wallace, Republican County Chairs Association)</p> <p>On — Keith Ingram, Texas Secretary of State Elections Division</p>
BACKGROUND:	Election Code, sec. 13.073 requires a voter registrar to give an applicant whose voter registration was rejected oral or written notice of the reason for the rejection.
DIGEST:	<p>HB 2570 would require the voter registrar to identify in the oral or written notice provided under Election Code, sec. 13.073, which section or sections of the application resulted in the rejection of the application. The registrar would need to specify if each identified section was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• incomplete;• improperly filled out; or• contained information identifying the applicant as ineligible to vote. <p>The bill would take effect September 1, 2013.</p>
SUPPORTERS SAY:	HB 2570 would help people register to vote and assist re-applicants in correcting the problems that caused their voter registrations to be rejected.

Currently, many rejected applicants receive non-specific information in form letters that may look like junk mail and do not assist them to successfully re-apply. The voter registration form can be confusing and a mistake as simple as forgetting to check a box can result in a rejection. This can lead applicants to commit the same mistake repeatedly and experiencing delays and frustration in their attempts to register to vote. The bill would increase success rates for re-applicants by informing them of what they are doing incorrectly. The minor risk that the bill would assist a volunteer deputy registrar to fraudulently complete an application is greatly outweighed by the need to ensure that those who are eligible to vote are able to register successfully.

The bill would ensure that voter registrars remained in compliance with the law and save money on litigation for violations of the Election Code. In 2012, Harris County was sued for failing to provide an adequate reason for rejecting voters. HB 2570 would ensure that counties provided sufficient information and prevent future litigation. The fiscal note indicates that the bill would have no fiscal impact to counties or local units of government.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

The bill would provide failed fraudsters with exactly the information they need to successfully accomplish voter registration fraud. Because many voters' registrar organizations have quotas, some volunteer deputy registrars are incentivized to fraudulently complete and send in voter registration applications for others. If the information is incorrect, the application will fail, but if the response letters are required to identify which part of the fraudulent application was incorrect, this would provide exactly the information needed in an attempt to successfully fraudulently reapply.

The bill would create a huge undertaking for Harris County. In 2008, the voter registrar received over 74,000 incomplete applications in the month before the election. Requiring the registrar to mail out 74,000 personalized letters with specific information would be a costly, undue burden to the county.