ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR

ASSEMBLY, No. 4320

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: AUGUST 24, 2020

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably the Assembly Committee Substitute for Assembly Bill No. 4320.

This bill extends certain ballot receipt and election certification deadlines; increases certain messenger and bearer ballot limits; and requires certain information to increase public awareness and use of voting by mail.

Under the bill, the Secretary of State is required to:

(1) prepare informational posters for use at all polling places that promote voting by mail,

(2) include with mail-in ballots information for the voter on how to check the status of the voter's mail-in ballot, and

(3) provide educational materials to county board of elections employees on the standards for acceptance and rejection of mail-in ballots.

The educational materials prepared by the Secretary of State would serve an educational purpose for the county board and would not replace, supersede, or void the authority of the county board or a judge of the Superior Court to accept or reject a mail-in ballot.

This bill also prohibits the rejection of a mail-in ballot due to any defect arising out of or relating to the preparation or mailing of the ballot or envelope that was not reasonably caused by the voters, such as a torn envelope and missing or insufficient glue to allow the ballot to be sealed.

This bill also extends the deadline by which mail-in ballots bearing a postmark before or on the day of the election must be received by the county board of elections in order to be canvassed from 48 hours after the closing of the polls to 144 hours after the closing of the polls. The bill would also require that every mail-in ballot that does not bear a postmark date but that is received by the county board by delivery of the United States Postal Service before 48 hours after the time of the closing of the polls for the election for which the ballot was prepared is to be considered valid and canvassed.

This bill also establishes an alternative way to cure signature defects on applications for a mail-in ballot by requiring notification to the applicant within 24 hours of the determination of disapproval.

Under the bill, the notice must state the specific reasons for the disapproval and inform the applicant of the opportunity to challenge the disapproval by contacting the county clerk's office. This bill also provides that the county clerk would be responsible for preparing and furnishing ballots for municipal elections and extends certain deadlines for the certification of election results by the municipal clerk, the meeting of the board of county canvassers, and the transmission of the statement of the canvass or other statements to the Secretary of State.

Finally, the bill allows a person to serve as an authorized messenger or bearer for five qualified voters if those voters are an immediate family member residing in the same household as the messenger or bearer.

The bill provides that the sections concerning the 24-hour notice and authorized messengers and bearers will not take effect until February 1, 2021.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Office of Legislative Services estimates that this bill will result in an indeterminate increase in State and local government costs.