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**SENATE BILL 6002**

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**State of Washington 65th Legislature 2018 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Saldaña, Billig, Palumbo, Frockt, Rolfes, Van De Wege, Liias, Ranker, Keiser, Pedersen, Hunt, Wellman, Conway, Chase, McCoy, Dhingra, Kuderer, Hasegawa, Nelson, Carlyle, and Mullet

AN ACT Relating to establishing a voting rights act to promote equal voting opportunity in certain political subdivisions and establishing a cause of action to redress lack of voter opportunity; amending RCW 36.32.020, 36.32.040, and 54.12.010; adding a new section to chapter 28A.343 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 35.21 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 35A.21 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 52.14 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 53.12 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 29A.76 RCW; and adding a new chapter to Title 29A RCW.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**PART I - GENERAL PROVISIONS**

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act may be known and cited as the Washington voting rights act of 2018.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that electoral systems that deny race, color, or language minority groups an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice are inconsistent with the right to free and equal elections as provided by Article I, section 19 and Article VI, section 1 of the Washington state Constitution as well as protections found in the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution. The well-established principle of "one person, one vote" and the prohibition on vote dilution have been consistently upheld in federal and state courts for more than fifty years.

The legislature also finds that local government subdivisions are often prohibited from addressing these challenges because of Washington laws that narrowly prescribe the methods by which they may elect members of their legislative bodies. The legislature finds that in some cases, this has resulted in an improper dilution of voting power for these minority groups. The legislature intends to modify existing prohibitions in state laws so that these jurisdictions may voluntarily adopt changes on their own, in collaboration with affected community members, to remedy potential electoral issues so that minority groups have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice or influence the outcome of an election.

The legislature intends for this act to be consistent with federal protections that may provide a similar remedy for minority groups. Remedies shall also be available where either the drawing of leaning and influence districts or the use of an alternative proportional voting method is able to address both vote dilution and racial polarization.

The legislature also intends for this act to be consistent with legal precedent from *Mt. Spokane Skiing Corp. v. Spokane Co.* (86 Wn. App. 165, 1997) that found that noncharter counties need not adhere to a single uniform county system of government, but that each county have the same "authority available" in order to be deemed uniform.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise. In applying these definitions and other terms in this chapter, courts may rely on relevant federal case law for guidance.

(1) "Alternative proportional voting method" means any at-large election that includes one of the following methods of voting for multiple members of the governing body of a political subdivision:

(a) Limiting the number of votes a voter is entitled to cast to fewer than there are positions to elect;

(b) Cumulating the number of votes a voter is entitled to cast for each position, and allowing the voter to cast the total number of votes in favor of a single candidate or to distribute the total number of votes among multiple candidates; or

(c) Voting in a single transferable vote where voters rank each candidate in order of preference, with their vote counting towards the highest ranked candidate, and preferences allocated among other candidates who are not elected on first place votes.

(2) "At-large election" means any of the following methods of electing members of the governing body of a political subdivision:

(a) One in which the voters of the entire jurisdiction elect the members to the governing body;

(b) One in which the candidates are required to reside within given areas of the jurisdiction and the voters of the entire jurisdiction elect the members to the governing body; or

(c) One that combines the criteria in (a) and (b) of this subsection or one that combines at-large with district-based elections.

(3) "District-based elections" means a method of electing members to the governing body of a political subdivision in which the candidate must reside within an election district that is a divisible part of the political subdivision and is elected only by voters residing within that election district.

(4) "Polarized voting" means voting in which there is a difference, as defined in case law regarding enforcement of the federal voting rights act, 52 U.S.C. 10301 et seq., in the choice of candidates or other electoral choices that are preferred by voters in a protected class, and in the choice of candidates and electoral choices that are preferred by voters in the rest of the electorate.

(5) "Political subdivision" means any county, city, town, school district, fire protection district, port district, or public utility district, but does not include the state.

(6) "Protected class" means a class of voters who are members of a race, color, or language minority group, as this class is referenced and defined in the federal voting rights act, 52 U.S.C. 10301 et seq.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  As provided in section 302 of this act, no method of electing the governing body of a political subdivision may be imposed or applied in a manner that impairs the ability of members of a protected class to have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice or an equal opportunity to influence the outcome of an election as a result of the dilution or abridgment of the rights of voters who are members of a protected class.

**PART II - VOLUNTARY CHANGES TO ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) A political subdivision that conducts an election pursuant to state, county, or local law, is authorized to change its electoral system including, but not limited to, implementing a district-based election system or an alternative proportional voting method to remedy a potential violation of section 104 of this act.

(2) If a political subdivision invokes its authority under this section to implement a district-based election system, the districts shall be drawn in a manner consistent with section 202 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1)(a) Prior to the adoption of its proposed plan, the political subdivision must provide public notice to the community about the proposed remedy to a potential violation of section 104 of this act. If a significant segment of the community has limited English proficiency and speaks a language other than English, the political subdivision must:

(i) Provide accurate written and verbal notice of the proposed remedy in languages that diverse residents of the political subdivision can understand, as indicated by demographic data; and

(ii) Air radio or television public service announcements describing the proposed remedy broadcast in the languages that diverse residents of the political subdivision can understand, as indicated by demographic data.

(b) The political subdivision shall hold at least one public hearing on the proposed plan at least one week before adoption.

(c) For purposes of this section, "significant segment of the community" means five percent or more of residents, or five hundred or more residents, whichever is fewer, residing in the political subdivision.

(2)(a) If the political subdivision invokes its authority under this section and the plan is adopted during the period of time between the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November and on or before January 15th of the following year, the political subdivision shall order new elections to occur at the next succeeding general election.

(b) If the political subdivision invokes its authority under this section and the plan is adopted during the period of time between January 16th and on or before the first Monday of November, the next election will occur as scheduled and organized under the current electoral system, but the political subdivision shall order new elections to occur pursuant to the remedy at the general election the following calendar year.

(c) If the political subdivision invokes its authority under this section and the plan uses an alternative proportional voting method, the political subdivision shall order new elections to occur no sooner than as provided in (a) and (b) of this subsection.

(3) If a political subdivision implements a district-based election system, the plan shall be consistent with the following criteria:

(a) Each district shall be as reasonably equal in population as possible to each and every other such district comprising the political subdivision.

(b) Each district shall be reasonably compact.

(c) Each district shall consist of geographically contiguous area.

(d) To the extent feasible, the district boundaries shall coincide with existing recognized natural boundaries and shall, to the extent possible, preserve existing communities of related and mutual interest.

(e) District boundaries may not be drawn or maintained in a manner that denies a protected class an equal opportunity to elect candidates of its choice or an equal opportunity to influence the outcome of an election.

(4) Within forty-five days after receipt of federal decennial census information applicable to a specific local area, the commission established in RCW 44.05.030 shall forward the census information to each political subdivision that has invoked its authority under this section to implement a district-based election system, or that is charged with redistricting under section 403 of this act.

(5) No later than eight months after its receipt of federal decennial census data, the governing body of the political subdivision that had previously invoked its authority under this section to implement a district-based election system, or that was previously charged with redistricting under section 403 of this act, shall prepare a plan for redistricting its districts, pursuant to RCW 29A.76.010, and in a manner consistent with this act.

(6) A political subdivision may eliminate the staggered terms of any position in order to implement an alternative proportional voting method.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 28A.343 RCW to read as follows:

The school board of directors may authorize a change to its electoral system pursuant to section 201 of this act. Any staggering of directors' terms shall be accomplished as provided in RCW 28A.343.030 and 28A.343.600 through 28A.343.650.

**Sec.**  RCW 36.32.020 and 1982 c 226 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

The board of county commissioners of each county shall divide their county into three commissioner districts so that each district shall comprise as nearly as possible one-third of the population of the county: PROVIDED, That the territory comprised in any voting precincts of such districts shall remain compact, and shall not be divided by the lines of said districts.

However, the commissioners of any county composed entirely of islands and with a population of less than thirty-five thousand may divide their county into three commissioner districts without regard to population, except that if any single island is included in more than one district, the districts on such island shall comprise, as nearly as possible, equal populations.

The commissioners of any county may authorize a change to their electoral system pursuant to section 201 of this act. Except where necessary to comply with a court order issued pursuant to section 403 of this act, the lines of the districts shall not be changed ((~~oftener~~)) more often than once in four years and only when a full board of commissioners is present. The districts shall be designated as districts numbered one, two and three.

**Sec.**  RCW 36.32.040 and 1982 c 226 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, the qualified electors of each county commissioner district, and they only, shall nominate from among their own number, candidates for the office of county commissioner of such commissioner district to be voted for at the following general election. Such candidates shall be nominated in the same manner as candidates for other county and district offices are nominated in all other respects.

(2) Where the commissioners of a county composed entirely of islands with a population of less than thirty-five thousand have chosen to divide the county into unequal-sized commissioner districts pursuant to the exception provided in RCW 36.32.020, the qualified electors of the entire county shall nominate from among their own number who reside within a commissioner district, candidates for the office of county commissioner of such commissioner district to be voted for at the following general election. Such candidates shall be nominated in the same manner as candidates for other county offices are nominated in all other respects.

(3) The commissioners of any county may authorize a change to their electoral system pursuant to section 201 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 35.21 RCW to read as follows:

The legislative authority of a city or town may authorize a change to its electoral system pursuant to section 201 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 35A.21 RCW to read as follows:

The legislative authority of a code city or town may authorize a change to its electoral system pursuant to section 201 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 52.14 RCW to read as follows:

The board of fire commissioners of a fire protection district may authorize a change to its electoral system pursuant to section 201 of this act by majority vote.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 53.12 RCW to read as follows:

The port commission may authorize a change to its electoral system pursuant to section 201 of this act.

**Sec.**  RCW 54.12.010 and 2004 c 113 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

A public utility district that is created as provided in RCW 54.08.010 shall be a municipal corporation of the state of Washington, and the name of such public utility district shall be Public Utility District No. . . . . of . . . . . . County.

The powers of the public utility district shall be exercised through a commission consisting of three members in three commissioner districts, and five members in five commissioner districts.

(1) If the public utility district is countywide and the county has three county legislative authority districts, then, at the first election of commissioners and until any change is made in the boundaries of public utility district commissioner districts, one public utility district commissioner shall be chosen from each of the three county legislative authority districts.

(2) If the public utility district comprises only a portion of the county, with boundaries established in accordance with chapter 54.08 RCW, or if the public utility district is countywide and the county does not have three county legislative authority districts, three public utility district commissioner districts, numbered consecutively, each with approximately equal population and following precinct lines, as far as practicable, shall be described in the petition for the formation of the public utility district, subject to appropriate change by the county legislative authority if and when it changes the boundaries of the proposed public utility district. One commissioner shall be elected as a commissioner of each of the public utility district commissioner districts.

(3) Only a registered voter who resides in a commissioner district may be a candidate for, or hold office as, a commissioner of the commissioner district. Only voters of a commissioner district may vote at a primary to nominate candidates for a commissioner of the commissioner district. Voters of the entire public utility district may vote at a general election to elect a person as a commissioner of the commissioner district.

(4) The term of office of each public utility district commissioner other than the commissioners at large shall be six years, and the term of each commissioner at large shall be four years. Each term shall be computed in accordance with RCW ((~~29A.20.040~~)) 29A.60.280 following the commissioner's election. All public utility district commissioners shall hold office until their successors shall have been elected and have qualified and assume office in accordance with RCW ((~~29A.20.040~~)) 29A.60.280.

(5) A vacancy in the office of public utility district commissioner shall occur as provided in chapter 42.12 RCW or by nonattendance at meetings of the public utility district commission for a period of sixty days unless excused by the public utility district commission. Vacancies on a board of public utility district commissioners shall be filled as provided in chapter 42.12 RCW.

(6) The boundaries of the public utility district commissioner districts may be changed only by the public utility district commission or by a court order issued pursuant to section 403 of this act, and shall be examined every ten years to determine substantial equality of population in accordance with chapter 29A.76 RCW. Except as provided in this section, section 403 of this act, or RCW 54.04.039, the boundaries shall not be changed ((~~oftener~~)) more often than once in four years. Boundaries may only be changed when all members of the commission are present. Whenever territory is added to a public utility district under RCW 54.04.035, or added or withdrawn under RCW 54.04.039, the boundaries of the public utility commissioner districts shall be changed to include the additional or exclude the withdrawn territory. Unless the boundaries are changed pursuant to RCW 54.04.039, the proposed change of the boundaries of the public utility district commissioner district must be made by resolution and after public hearing. Notice of the time of the public hearing shall be published for two weeks before the hearing. Upon a referendum petition signed by ten percent of the qualified voters of the public utility district being filed with the county auditor, the county legislative authority shall submit the proposed change of boundaries to the voters of the public utility district for their approval or rejection. The petition must be filed within ninety days after the adoption of resolution of the proposed action. The validity of the petition is governed by the provisions of chapter 54.08 RCW.

**PART III - CITIZEN-INITIATED CHANGES TO ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) A person who intends to challenge a political subdivision's electoral system under this act shall first notify the political subdivision. The political subdivision shall promptly make such notice public.

(2) The notice provided shall identify the person or persons who intend to file an action, and the protected class or classes whose members do not have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice or an equal opportunity to influence the outcome of an election. The notice shall also include a specific description of the alleged vote dilution and polarized voting, and a type of remedy the person believes may address the alleged violation of section 302 of this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) A political subdivision is in violation of this act when it is shown that:

(a) Elections in the political subdivision exhibit polarized voting; and

(b) Members of a protected class do not have an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice or an equal opportunity to influence the outcome of an election.

(2) The fact that members of a protected class are not geographically compact or concentrated to constitute a majority in a proposed or existing district-based election district shall not preclude a finding of a violation under this act, but may be a factor in determining a remedy.

(3) In determining whether there is polarized voting under this act, the court shall analyze elections of the governing body of the political subdivision, ballot measure elections, elections in which at least one candidate is a member of a protected class, and other electoral choices that affect the rights and privileges of members of a protected class. Only elections conducted prior to the filing of an action pursuant to this act shall be used to establish or rebut the existence of polarized voting.

(4) The election of candidates who are members of a protected class and who were elected prior to the filing of an action pursuant to this act shall not preclude a finding of polarized voting that results in an unequal opportunity for a protected class to elect candidates of their choice or influence the outcome of an election.

(5) Proof of intent on the part of the voters or elected officials to discriminate against a protected class is not required for a cause of action to be sustained.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The political subdivision shall work in good faith with the person providing the notice to implement a remedy that provides the protected class or classes identified in the notice an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice or influence the outcome of an election.

(2) If the political subdivision adopts a remedy that takes the notice into account, or adopts the notice's proposed remedy, the political subdivision shall seek a court order acknowledging that the political subdivision's remedy complies with section 104 of this act. The person who submitted the notice may support or oppose such an order, and may obtain public records to do so. The political subdivision must provide all political, census, and demographic data and any analysis of that data used to develop the remedy in its filings seeking the court order and with any documents made public.

(3) If the court concludes that the political subdivision's remedy complies with section 104 of this act, an action under this act may not be brought against that political subdivision for four years by any party so long as the political subdivision does not enact a change to or deviation from the remedy during this four-year period that would otherwise give rise to an action under this act.

(4) In agreeing to adopt the person's proposed remedy, the political subdivision may do so by stipulation, which shall become a public document.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) Any person may file an action under this act if, one hundred eighty days after a political subdivision receives notice of a challenge to its electoral system under section 301 of this act, the political subdivision has not obtained a court order stating that it has adopted a remedy in compliance with section 104 of this act.

(2) If, within one hundred eighty days after receiving a person's notice, a political subdivision receives any other notice containing a materially different proposed remedy than the first notice, no action may be filed under this act within two hundred seventy days after receiving the initial notice. All notices shall be made public promptly.

(3) If a political subdivision has received two or more notices containing materially different proposed remedies, the political subdivision shall work in good faith with the persons to implement a remedy that provides the protected class or classes identified in the notices an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice or influence the outcome of an election. If the political subdivision adopts one of the remedies offered, or a different remedy that takes multiple notices into account, the political subdivision shall seek a court order acknowledging that the political subdivision's remedy complies with section 104 of this act. The persons who submitted notices may support or oppose such an order. The political subdivision must provide all political, census, and demographic data and any analysis of that data used to develop the remedy in its filings seeking the court order.

(4) If the court concludes that the political subdivision's remedy complies with section 104 of this act, an action under this act may not be brought against that political subdivision for four years by any party so long as the political subdivision does not enact a change to or deviation from the remedy during this four-year period that would otherwise give rise to an action under this act.

**PART IV - SAFE HARBOR AND LEGAL ACTION UNDER THIS ACT**

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) After exhaustion of the time period in section 304 of this act, any voter who resides in a political subdivision where a violation of section 104 of this act is alleged may file an action in the superior court of the county in which the political subdivision is located. If the action is against a county, the action may be filed in the superior court of such county, or in the superior court of either of the two nearest judicial districts as determined pursuant to RCW 36.01.050(2). An action filed pursuant to this chapter does not need to be filed as a class action.

(2) Members of different protected classes may file an action jointly pursuant to this act if they demonstrate that their combined voting preferences as a group are different from the rest of the electorate.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) In an action filed pursuant to this act, the trial court shall set a trial to be held no later than one year after the filing of a complaint, and shall set a discovery and motions calendar accordingly.

(2) For purposes of any applicable statute of limitations, a cause of action under this act arises every time there is an election for any members of the governing body of the political subdivision.

(3) The plaintiff's constitutional right to the secrecy of the plaintiff's vote is preserved and is not waived by the filing of an action pursuant to this act, and the filing is not subject to discovery or disclosure.

(4) In seeking a temporary restraining order or a preliminary injunction, a plaintiff shall not be required to post a bond or any other security in order to secure such equitable relief.

(5) No notice may be submitted to any political subdivision pursuant to this act before July 19, 2018.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The court may order appropriate remedies including, but not limited to, the imposition of a district-based election system or an alternative proportional voting method. The court may order the affected jurisdiction to draw or redraw district boundaries or appoint an individual or panel to draw or redraw district lines. The proposed districts must be approved by the court prior to their implementation.

(2) Implementation of a district-based remedy is not precluded by the fact that members of a protected class do not constitute a numerical majority within a proposed district-based election district. If, in tailoring a remedy, the court orders the implementation of a district-based election district where the members of the protected class are not a numerical majority, the court shall do so in a manner that provides the protected class an equal opportunity to elect candidates of their choice or an equal opportunity to influence the outcome of an election.

(3) In tailoring a remedy after a finding of a violation of section 104 of this act:

(a) If the court's order providing a remedy or approving proposed districts, whichever is later, is issued during the period of time between the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November and on or before January 15th of the following year, the court shall order new elections, conducted pursuant to the remedy, to occur at the next succeeding general election. If a special filing period is required, filings for that office shall be reopened for a period of three business days, such three-day period to be fixed by the filing officer.

(b) If the court's order providing a remedy or approving proposed districts, whichever is later, is issued during the period of time between January 16th and on or before the first Monday of November, the next election will occur as scheduled and organized under the current electoral system, but the court shall order new elections to occur pursuant to the remedy at the general election the following calendar year.

(c) If the court's order uses an alternative proportional voting method, the court shall order new elections to occur no sooner than as provided in (a) and (b) of this subsection.

(d) The remedy may provide for a political subdivision to eliminate the staggered terms of any position in order to implement an alternative proportional voting method.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) No action under this act may be brought by any person against a political subdivision that has adopted a remedy to its electoral system after an action is filed that is approved by a court pursuant to section 303 of this act or implemented a court-ordered remedy pursuant to section 403 of this act for four years after adoption of the remedy if the political subdivision does not enact a change to or deviation from the remedy during this four-year period that would otherwise give rise to an action under this act.

(2) No action under this act may be brought by any person against a political subdivision that has adopted a remedy to its electoral system in the previous decade before the effective date of this section as a result of a claim under the federal voting rights act until after the political subdivision completes redistricting pursuant to RCW 29A.76.010 for the 2020 decennial census.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) In any action to enforce this chapter, the court may allow the prevailing plaintiff or plaintiffs, other than the state or political subdivision thereof, reasonable attorneys' fees, all nonattorney fee costs as defined by RCW 4.84.010, and all reasonable expert witness fees. No fees or costs may be awarded if no action is filed.

(2) Prevailing defendants may recover an award of fees or costs pursuant to RCW 4.84.185.

**PART V - MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS**

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The provisions of parts I, III, and IV of this act are not applicable to cities and towns with populations under one thousand or to school districts with K-12 full-time equivalent enrollments of less than two hundred fifty.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 29A.76 RCW to read as follows:

In any change to its electoral system under section 201 of this act or preparation of a subsequent redistricting plan, political subdivisions may use population data regarding political parties or racial, ethnic, or language groups only to the extent necessary to ensure compliance with this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act supersedes other state laws and local ordinances to the extent that those state laws or ordinances would otherwise restrict a jurisdiction's ability to comply with this act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  If any provision of this act or its application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 101 through 202, 301 through 501, and 503 of this act constitute a new chapter in Title 29A RCW.

**--- END ---**