State Government, Elections & Information Technology Committee

HB 2746

Brief Description: Providing options for local governments to adopt alternative voting procedures.

Sponsors: Representatives Hudgins, Macri, Goodman, Dolan, Stanford, Lovick, Fitzgibbon, Gregerson, Robinson, Sells, Frame, Appleton, Bergquist, Peterson and Slatter.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows counties, cities, towns, and districts to eliminate the primary for any single or multiple position office.
- Allows counties, cities, towns, and districts to implement a proportional voting system for any multiple position office.

Hearing Date: 1/26/18

Staff: Sean Flynn (786-7124).

Background:

Primaries. Washington's two-stage election process includes a primary that precedes the general election. In the primary, the names of all candidates that file for office generally will appear on the primary ballot, with the top two candidates advancing to the general election. A primary must be held for the election of any partisan office. A primary also is held for nonpartisan offices, except where two or fewer candidates have filed for the position. Primaries are not required for officers of certain local districts, including park districts or cemetery districts.

Alternative Voting Systems. Most state and local election systems in this country involve plurality voting, where a voter chooses one candidate per office and the candidate with the most votes wins. Other voting methods have been created where voters are offered multiple choice in a single race and those votes are tabulated according to different methods.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Ranked-choice voting, also known as instant-runoff voting, is one such alternative method. In ranked-choice voting, voters initially rank every candidate for a single office on the same ballot, based on their order of preference. The ranked votes are then tabulated, starting with the first choice of each voter. If no candidate has enough first-choice votes to constitute a majority, then the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated, and a second round of tabulation occurs. If a voter's first choice is eliminated, then his or her next choice is counted in the subsequent round. This process continues until a candidate receives a majority.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, ranked choice voting has been adopted in a number of cities, including: St. Paul and Minneapolis Minnesota; Portland, Maine; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and San Francisco, California. In Washington, Pierce County voters authorized ranked-choice voting as an amendment to the county charter, which was implemented in the 2008 election for county officers. The authorization was subsequently repealed by the voters in 2009.

Summary of Bill:

Any county, city, town, or local district may eliminate the primary for any partisan or nonpartisan single or multiple position office. The elimination of the primary may not change other election deadlines, including the deadline for filing declarations of candidacy.

The governing body of any county, city, town, or local district may authorize a proportional voting system for any office with multiple positions. A proportional voting system may include, but is not limited to, ranked-choice voting, where voters designate candidates by an order of preference. The Secretary of State must approve any proportional voting system, to ensure compliance with state election law, before it is adopted by a local jurisdiction.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 19, 2018.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.