

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 2669

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 24, 2004

Title: An act relating to establishing a pilot project to examine the use of instant runoff voting for nonpartisan offices.

Brief Description: Establishing a pilot project to examine the use of instant runoff voting for nonpartisan offices.

Sponsors: Representatives Moeller, Jarrett, Santos, Cox, Upthegrove, Newhouse, Chase, Lovick, Clibborn, Morrell, Wallace, Nixon, Wood, Kagi and McDermott.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/24/04 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Stevens, Vice Chair; Berkey, Fairley, Kastama and McCaslin.

Staff: Mac Nicholson (786-7445)

Background: Instant runoff voting (IRV) is an election method requiring candidates to receive a majority, rather than a plurality, of the votes cast in a particular race. While requirements vary, under IRV, voters may select more than one candidate for a single race and rank candidates in a preferential order. A candidate receiving a majority of "first choice" votes is elected. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast in the race after the first counting stage, the "second choice" designations indicated on the ballots cast for the candidate receiving the fewest votes become additional votes for the candidates indicated on those ballot choices. This process generally continues until a candidate receives a majority of the votes cast for the position or until all but one candidate has been eliminated.

Summary of Bill: The Secretary of State (SoS) is required to conduct a five year pilot project to study the effects of using instant runoff voting (IRV) as a local option for nonpartisan offices in any qualifying city. The pilot project must commence following submission to the SoS of a notification of participation from the auditor of a county containing a city that has demonstrated specific support for IRV. The pilot project must begin by August 1, 2007, and conclude by July 1, 2012. Among other requirements, the SoS must submit a report of findings to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by July 1, 2012.

For the purposes of the pilot project, a qualifying city must:

- be classified as a first class city;
- have a population greater than 140,000 and less than 200,000;

- have demonstrated support for IRV through voter approval of a related ballot measure; and
- have satisfied specific city charter amendment provisions.

Following the timely receipt of a notification of participation from a qualifying county auditor, the SoS must:

- certify at least one city in that county to qualify and participate in the pilot project;
- develop and adopt rules governing the conduct of IRV elections; and
- develop a pilot project timeline.

Additionally, all election equipment and related processes must be certified by the SoS before the conduct of an IRV election.

The legislative body of a qualifying city may, after satisfying charter amendment requirements and other criteria, adopt IRV as an alternative method of electing candidates for all nonpartisan city offices. The city must notify the applicable county auditor and the SoS before conducting an IRV election.

If the county auditor notifies the city that existing county election equipment is insufficient for the conduct of an IRV election, the city and county must reach an agreement for the purchase of any new equipment required for the election.

No primary election may be held for nonpartisan offices in any first class city if the city is a participant in the pilot project and is conducting an authorized IRV election. Participating cities conducting an IRV election must certify the results on or before the 30th day after the election.

Provisions related to the conduct of the pilot project, including tabulation and timeline requirements, and ballot design and processing specifications, are established.

The pilot project and most amendatory provisions expire on July 1, 2012.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The bill just allows a pilot project to look at IRV and see how it really works. Many groups, including the Secretary of State and county auditors, support the concept and the city of Vancouver has already amended the charter to allow for IRV. The bill just gives the city the option to move forward.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Rep. Moeller, prime sponsor; Cherie Davidson, League of Women Voters of Washington; Hal Lymus, Office of the Secretary of State; Mark Brown, City of Vancouver.