

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1727

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Title: An act relating to odd-numbered year elections.

Brief Description: Concerning odd-numbered year elections.

Sponsors: Representatives Gregerson, Entenman, Bateman, Macri, Peterson, Ramos, Simmons, Harris-Talley and Frame.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/19/22, 1/26/22 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Eliminates the statewide general election in odd-numbered years.
- Permits elections in odd-numbered years in limited circumstances, including special elections and local government elections for entities that choose to maintain odd-numbered-year elections until 2028.
- Provides that elected officials whose term is scheduled to expire before the next general election is held shall continue to serve until the next general election.
- Eliminates or modifies references to general elections in odd-numbered years throughout the code.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Valdez, Chair; Lekanoff, Vice Chair; Dolan and Gregerson.

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

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Volz, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Graham.

Staff: Jason Zolle (786-7124).

Background:

Every November, the state holds a statewide general election. In years that end in an even number, the election includes general elections for federal, state, and county officers, as well as state or local ballot measures such as initiatives, referenda, and constitutional amendments.

In years that end in an odd number, general elections are held for city, town, and special district officers, subject to a few exceptions. In addition, odd-year elections may include elections for:

- federal, state, and county officers, state legislators, supreme court justices, and superior court judges to fill the remainder of unexpired terms;
- county officers in a county governed by a charter that provides for odd-year elections; and
- state ballot measures.

State ballot measures must appear on the ballot at the next regular general election, and therefore they may appear in either even- or odd-numbered years. Special elections and recall elections also may occur in either even- or odd-numbered years.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The statewide general election in odd-numbered years is eliminated. Elections are permitted in odd-numbered years only for:

- county, city, town, and special district general elections before the year 2028, unless the entity chooses to switch to even-numbered years before then;
- special elections called for any purpose authorized by law;
- elections for recall of a public officer;
- public utility districts, conservation districts, or district elections at which property ownership is a prerequisite to voting;
- consolidation proposals and non-high capital fund aid proposals; and
- special flood control districts consisting of three or more counties.

Whenever the application of this act results in a situation in which the term of office of an elected official is scheduled to expire but a general election for that office has not yet been held, the elected official shall continue to serve until a successor is elected and qualified. For example, a city councilmember elected in 2019 whose term is scheduled to expire at the end of 2023 shall continue to serve that term until reelected or replaced in the 2024 election.

References to elections in odd-numbered years throughout the code are eliminated or modified.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill reinserts the word "general" into one of the sections of law that require the state to assume a prorated share of election costs in certain elections.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 24, 2022.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect on January 1, 2023.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Aligning local elections with federal and state elections in even years helps to increase turnout by making it easier for working families and busy people to vote. Off-cycle elections typically have a lower turnout of young people and people of color. Voter turnout can double or triple just by holding the same elections during on-cycle years. Election results are better when more people participate. Polls show that more people want odd-year elections to be phased out. Switching to even-year elections did not increase the number of undervotes in local elections, and it saves money.

(Opposed) It violates the Washington Constitution to remove the ability to vote on initiatives and referenda in odd-numbered years. If the Legislature meets every year, then people should have the right to hold legislators accountable every year as well. If voters do not vote in off-cycle elections, that is because they are lazy. This bill makes it appear as if the Legislature is trying to game the system and muzzle the public. Washington entities in general are moving away from accountability to the public. Holding elections only in even-numbered years would affect the ability of county auditors to retain staff. The solution to low turnout is encouraging people to become more informed and vote. People should get in the habit of voting every year.

(Other) Elections still held in odd-numbered years after this bill may get very little turnout when they are not bundled. It will take some work to have counties align their charters with this bill. There are a number of election bills this session and the Legislature needs to make sure they all work together.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Mia Gregerson, prime sponsor; Andrew Villeneuve, Northwest Progressive Institute; Chris Roberts; Shasti Conrad, King County Democrats; Mike McGinn; and Paul Charbonneau.

(Opposed) Linda Yang, Washington Asians For Equality; Kan Qiu, I-200 Political Action Committee; Tim Eyman; Tom Eyman; Jeff Pack, Washington Citizens Against Unfair Taxes; Zack Zinter; Paddy McGuire; Laurie Layne; Joe Kunzler; and Margaret Tweet.

(Other) Mike Hoover, Washington State Association of Counties.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: Jazmine Smith, The Washington Bus; William Doggett; Dan Li; and Yi-Lei Wu.