
State Government & Tribal Relations Committee

HJR 4208

Brief Description: Removing gendered terms from the Constitution.

Sponsors: Representatives Ramos, Senn and Ramel.

<p>Brief Summary of Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Removes gendered terms from the Washington Constitution.
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Hearing Date: 1/9/24

Staff: Jason Zolle (786-7124).

Background:

The Washington Constitution (Constitution) is the foundational document of the state's government. The Constitution describes the processes by which the government functions, and it recognizes and establishes the rights of its citizens. Drafted by 75 elected delegates to a convention that met in Olympia in July and August 1889, the Constitution was ratified by Washington citizens at an election on October 1, 1889. It has been amended 109 times since, most recently in 2019.

The primary process to amend the Constitution begins in the Legislature: a proposed amendment must be passed by at least two-thirds of each the House of Representatives and the Senate, and then the amendment must be approved by a majority of voters at the next general election.

When describing the rights or responsibilities of individuals, the Constitution often uses male-gendered pronouns (e.g., he and him) to describe those individuals, even in circumstances in which the rights or responsibilities apply to all persons. Statutory law in Washington provides

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that as a rule of construction, male-gendered words may be extended to females also.

Summary of Bill:

The Constitution is amended to remove male-gendered pronouns. Provisions are reworded to avoid using such pronouns, or they are replaced with gender-neutral pronouns.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.