

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1932

As of February 23, 2024

Title: An act relating to shifting general elections for local governments to even-numbered years to increase voter participation.

Brief Description: Shifting general elections for local governments to even-numbered years to increase voter participation.

Sponsors: House Committee on State Government & Tribal Relations (originally sponsored by Representatives Gregerson, Farivar, Peterson, Alvarado, Berry, Ramel, Stearns, Mena, Bateman, Reed, Simmons, Ormsby, Macri, Street, Orwall, Goodman, Berg, Lekanoff, Reeves, Nance, Riccelli and Fosse).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/8/24, 52-45.

Committee Activity: State Government & Elections: 2/16/24, 2/20/24 [DPA, DNP].
Ways & Means: 2/23/24.

Brief Summary of Amended Bill

- Permits cities and towns to choose to hold their elections in even-numbered years instead of odd-numbered years.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Valdez, Vice Chair; Hasegawa and Kuderer.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Wilson, J., Ranking Member; Dozier and Fortunato.

Staff: Greg Vogel (786-7413)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

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.

Staff: Amanda Cecil (786-7460)

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 purpose district officers, subject to a few exceptions. In addition, odd-year elections may include elections for:

- filling the remainder of unexpired terms for federal, state, and county officers; state legislators; supreme court justices; and superior court judges;
- 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 Amended Bill: Cities and towns may choose to hold their elections in even-numbered years instead of odd-numbered years. To select this option, the legislative body of the jurisdiction must both adopt an ordinance or policy, and voters must approve an ordinance or charter amendment referred by the legislative body. A city or town moving its elections must hold two public hearings at least 30 days apart to consider public input, and a final vote may not occur sooner than 30 days after the second hearing.

If a jurisdiction chooses to switch its elections to even-numbered years, the term lengths of officers elected in the next odd-year election must be one year shorter than provided by law. The choice to switch must be adopted before January 15th of an odd-numbered year to take effect in that election cycle. A jurisdiction that chooses to switch back to odd-numbered year elections must transition back with similarly shortened terms.

EFFECT OF STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE AMENDMENT(S):

- Limits the authorization to move general elections to even-numbered years to cities and towns.
- Requires a city or town to both (1) adopt an ordinance or policy by its legislative body, and (2) receive approval by its voters to move its general elections to even-numbered years.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Engrossed Substitute House Bill (State Government & Elections): *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: This bill is not a mandate, it is very much about local options. When you look around the country, several states are already doing this. Specialists throughout every county are going to be able to advise all of the small and large districts and find out what works best for them, which is why cities are supporting this. We know that in odd years the voter turnout is dismal, especially during primaries. It's embarrassing and expensive to run these elections that don't get much turnout. Then they also don't have a happy electorate, because they feel like their representatives are not doing the work of the people. We also know that people turning out to vote in odd years are not working class people, they're not young people. Consumers like this approach. When they're polled, they would prefer to consolidate elections, it's too much to keep track of. This is a very smart, methodical, and small step to allow jurisdictions to do what they want to do. This is a data driven bill, the data shows when these elections are moved to even years, we do see more participation.

CON: Putting all elections in even years will extend the size of the ballot, in some cases, it'll be two pages long. The voter guides become larger, tomes if you will. Voter fatigue will occur. As you go down the ballot, people will drop off. Instead of voting being a civic duty, it will become a chore. Local elections will be drowned out by the state and federal races. If you make this move, jurisdictions with ranked choice voting will have two completely different voting systems in the same election cycle, causing voter confusion. Having two ballot cards makes it impossible to reconcile that type of election. The fluctuation in workload for elections would make it difficult for small counties to afford to retain full-time, certified, and experienced election staff.

OTHER: While I do like the idea of giving cities and towns the option, I do have concerns about the ballot length and voter fatigue.

Persons Testifying (State Government & Elections): PRO: Representative Mia Gregerson, Prime Sponsor; G. Agustin Markarian; Shannon Grimes, Sightline Institute; Andrew Villeneuve, Northwest Progressive Institute; Lindsey Schromen-Wawrin, Port Angeles City Councilmember; Cindy Black, Fix Democracy First; Jazmine Smith, The Washington Bus; Darya Farivar, State Representative to the 46th district.

CON: Laurie Layne; Tim Eyman, Initiative Activist; Steve Hobbs, Office of Secretary of State; Mary Hall, WSACA; Marianne Nichols, Pend Oreille County Auditor.

OTHER: Anthony Mixer, Conservative Advocate.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (State Government & Elections):

PRO: Madeline Bishop; SuYoung Yun, ACRS; Monique Meissner, Washington Community Alliance; Abigail Leong, WA Voting Justice Coalition.

CON: Conner Edwards, WA Professional Campaign Treasurer; Bryan Elliott, Kittitas County Auditor; Lori Larsen, Stevens County Auditor - WSACA; Paul Andrews, Kitsap County Auditor; Tad Sommerville; Eric pratt, America.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: This is optional for cities and towns. This will not result in four page ballots. The fiscal note is indeterminate, which is accurate but does not discuss the potential cost savings. The heaviest workload is already in odd years and voter turnout for races will be increased.

States that have done this have not experienced increases in costs and did experience an increase in voter turnout.

CON: Costs are driven by the size of the ballot. In jurisdictions like Seattle this change will result in two different election systems that will cause added confusion and require the Office of the Secretary of State to provide additional education. Large ballots drown out small races like school districts and PUDs. The current system was built to address ballot fatigue and allow voters to be informed on all the races. Long ballots will result in voter suppressions. This bill would create an unintended consequences of pushing school board elections to the bottom of a long ballot and make voter guides long and overwhelming. Not having odd year elections will result in reduced funding and negatively impact staff. Even though the move is optional this will have a negative impact by reduce counties ability to retain quality staff.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Andrew Villeneuve, Northwest Progressive Institute; Shannon Grimes, Sightline Institute; Chris Roberts, Mayor, City of Shoreline.

CON: Andy Cilley; Steve Hobbs, Office of the Secretary of State; Sam Reed; Marianne Nichols, Pend Oreille County Auditor; Vicky Dalton, Spokane County Auditor - WA State Assoc of County Auditors.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.