

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1339

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

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: Representatives Gregerson, Farivar, Mena, Nance, Stonier, Parshley, Thai, Scott, Goodman, Fey, Street, Doglio, Ramel, Simmons, Alvarado, Berg, Reed, Springer, Macri, Ryu, Peterson, Callan, Salahuddin, Duerr, Reeves, Berry, Ormsby, Hill, Pollet, Cortes and Fosse.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/21/25, 2/4/25 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Permits cities, towns, and certain special purpose districts to choose to hold their elections in even-numbered years instead of odd-numbered years.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Mena, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Doglio and Farivar.

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

Staff: Connor Schiff (786-7093).

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.

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-numbered-year elections may include elections for:

- filling the remainder of unexpired terms for state legislators, supreme court justices, superior court judges, and federal, state, and county officers;
- county officers in a county governed by a charter that provides for odd-numbered-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.

In first-class and charter cities, voters may amend the city's charter by petition and majority vote. The legislative body of a noncharter code city may provide its voters the powers of initiative and referendum.

Summary of Bill:

Cities, towns, and certain special purpose districts 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 may adopt an ordinance or policy; voters may approve an ordinance or charter amendment referred by the legislative body; or, in jurisdictions in which citizens are permitted to propose an initiative or charter amendment, voters may propose and approve an initiative or charter amendment.

Prior to adoption, the legislative body 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-numbered-year election shall be either one year shorter or one year longer than provided by law. The length of the transitional time must be specified in the ordinance, policy, initiative, or charter amendment. If a city, town, or special purpose district elects to hold its elections in even-numbered year, all elected positions in the jurisdiction must be elected in even-numbered years.

The choice to switch must be adopted before January 15 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 terms that are one year shorter than provided by law.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Voter turnout is down in odd-numbered-year elections. When more people vote in elections, there is a better electorate that better represents constituents. This is a nonpartisan issue. This would increase voter turnout and participation in elections. Local governments would not be required to hold their elections in even-numbered years; this bill would just give local governments the option to hold elections in even-numbered years. Data shows that people are more engaged in even-numbered-year elections. Data also shows that more people vote down ballot in even-numbered-year elections compared to odd-numbered-year elections. Turnout in even-numbered years more than doubles turnout in odd-numbered-year elections even when ballot drop off is taken into account. Most Americans support holding elections in even-numbered years. Nineteen states allow local governments to hold even-numbered-year elections.

(Opposed) This would be difficult to implement. The ballot would be longer, leading to ballot fatigue and drop off. There are potential issues with jamming, voter confusion, and ballot reconciliation. Switching to even-numbered-year elections would benefit incumbents. Local elections would receive less attention with more focus on federal and big state elections. There is a shortage of individuals who are able to staff campaigns and help candidates comply with campaign disclosure requirements; these individuals would also no longer be able to work each year. Other ways to increase voter engagement should be examined. The current system works and does not need to be changed. The concerns of election officials should be prioritized.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Mia Gregerson, prime sponsor; Andrew Villeneuve, Northwest Progressive Institute; Shannon Grimes, Sightline Institute; Zoltan Hajnal; John Ketcham, Manhattan Institute; Nilu Jenks, FairVote Washington; Denisse Guerrero, Washington Community Alliance; Cindy Black, Fix Democracy First; Chris Roberts; and Nigel Herbig.

(Opposed) Tim Eyman, Initiative Activist; Conner Edwards, Professional Campaign Treasurer / CG Edwards PLLC; Anthony Mixer, Conservative Advocate; Steve Hobbs,

Office of Secretary of State; Sam Reed, Retired Secretary of State; Laurie Layne; and Joe Kunzler.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.