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HOUSE BILL 1339

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State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

**By** 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

Read first time 01/16/25. Referred to Committee on State Government & Tribal Relations.

1 AN ACT Relating to shifting general elections for local  
2 governments to even-numbered years to increase voter participation;  
3 amending RCW 29A.04.330, 35.17.020, 35.18.270, 35.23.051, 35.27.090,  
4 35.30.080, 35A.02.050, 3.50.040, and 3.50.050; and creating a new  
5 section.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that participation  
8 in local government elections is integral to ensuring that local  
9 governments and elected officials accurately represent and are  
10 accountable to the communities which they serve. The legislature  
11 believes that when there is low voter participation in an election,  
12 policy outcomes are more favorable to special interests and less  
13 reflective of the needs of the broader community. Over the past eight  
14 years, Washington has had a dramatic gap between odd-year and even-  
15 year voter participation: Participation in local elections in odd-  
16 numbered years averages around 40.5 percent, while even-numbered year  
17 elections average around 80 percent participation, nearly double that  
18 of odd-year elections.

19 Under current law, local governments generally must conduct  
20 elections in odd-numbered years that do not coincide with federal or  
21 state elections. The legislature believes that holding local

1 government elections in even-numbered years will increase voter  
2 turnout and ensure that a broader cross-section of voters participate  
3 in contests for local offices, resulting in local governments that  
4 more accurately represent and reflect the desires and needs of their  
5 communities. In particular, an increase in voter turnout will ensure  
6 that the voices of younger voters, working and low-income families,  
7 and people with disabilities are heard. Therefore, to increase voter  
8 participation in local elections, the legislature intends to provide  
9 local governments the option to conduct local elections in even-  
10 numbered years.

11 **Sec. 2.** RCW 29A.04.330 and 2015 c 146 s 2 are each amended to  
12 read as follows:

13 (1) All city, town, and district general elections shall be held  
14 throughout the state of Washington on the first Tuesday following the  
15 first Monday in November in the odd-numbered years, except as  
16 provided in subsection (6) of this section.

17 This section shall not apply to:

18 (a) Elections for the recall of any elective public officer;

19 (b) Public utility districts, conservation districts, or district  
20 elections at which the ownership of property within those districts  
21 is a prerequisite to voting, all of which elections shall be held at  
22 the times prescribed in the laws specifically applicable thereto;

23 (c) Consolidation proposals as provided for in RCW 28A.315.235  
24 and nonhigh capital fund aid proposals as provided for in chapter  
25 28A.540 RCW; and

26 (d) Special flood control districts consisting of three or more  
27 counties.

28 (2) The county auditor, as ex officio supervisor of elections,  
29 upon request in the form of a resolution of the governing body of a  
30 city, town, or district, presented to the auditor prior to the  
31 proposed election date, shall call a special election in such city,  
32 town, or district, and for the purpose of such special election he or  
33 she may combine, unite, or divide precincts. Such a special election  
34 shall be held on one of the following dates as decided by the  
35 governing body:

36 (a) The second Tuesday in February;

37 (b) The fourth Tuesday in April;

38 (c) The day of the primary election as specified by RCW  
39 29A.04.311; or

1 (d) The first Tuesday after the first Monday in November.

2 (3) A resolution calling for a special election on a date set  
3 forth in subsection (2)(a) and (b) of this section must be presented  
4 to the county auditor at least sixty days prior to the election date.  
5 A resolution calling for a special election on a date set forth in  
6 subsection (2)(c) of this section must be presented to the county  
7 auditor no later than the Friday immediately before the first day of  
8 regular candidate filing. A resolution calling for a special election  
9 on a date set forth in subsection (2)(d) of this section must be  
10 presented to the county auditor no later than the day of the primary.

11 (4) In addition to subsection (2)(a) through (d) of this section,  
12 a special election to validate an excess levy or bond issue may be  
13 called at any time to meet the needs resulting from fire, flood,  
14 earthquake, or other act of God, except that no special election may  
15 be held between the first day for candidates to file for public  
16 office and the last day to certify the returns of the general  
17 election other than as provided in subsection (2)(c) and (d) of this  
18 section. Such special election shall be conducted and notice thereof  
19 given in the manner provided by law.

20 (5) This section shall supersede the provisions of any and all  
21 other statutes, whether general or special in nature, having  
22 different dates for such city, town, and district elections, the  
23 purpose of this section being to establish mandatory dates for  
24 holding elections, with the exception of subsection (6) of this  
25 section.

26 (6) A city, town, or special purpose district that holds its  
27 elections under this title may choose to hold its regular elections  
28 in even-numbered years by: Providing notice to the county or counties  
29 in which it is located following adoption of an ordinance or policy;  
30 approval by the voters of an ordinance or charter amendment referred  
31 by its legislative body; or, in jurisdictions in which citizens may  
32 propose an initiative or charter amendment under RCW 35.22.220,  
33 35A.11.080, or 35A.09.020, approval by the voters of an initiative or  
34 charter amendment proposed by the voters.

35 (a) A city, town, or special purpose district moving its regular  
36 elections to even-numbered years through adoption of an ordinance or  
37 policy by its legislative body must hold two public hearings not less  
38 than 30 days apart to consider public input. A vote on final adoption  
39 of the ordinance or policy may be taken only after at least 30 days

1 have elapsed since the date on which the second of the two public  
2 hearings was held.

3 (b) A city, town, or special purpose district moving its regular  
4 elections to even-numbered years must transition from odd-numbered to  
5 even-numbered years by electing each position to one term that is  
6 either one year shorter or one year longer in duration than provided  
7 by law. The length of the transitional term must be specified in the  
8 ordinance, policy, initiative, or charter amendment that proposes the  
9 transition. After conclusion of that term, beginning in an even-  
10 numbered year, elections for positions must be for their prescribed  
11 term lengths. For special purpose districts, this subsection shall  
12 supersede any conflicting provisions regarding term lengths in  
13 statutes governing the district.

14 (c) A city, town, or special purpose district that chooses to  
15 hold its elections in even-numbered years must do so for all elected  
16 positions in the jurisdiction.

17 (d) If a city, town, or special purpose district repeals an  
18 ordinance, charter amendment, or policy that moved its elections to  
19 even-numbered years, the jurisdiction shall transition back to odd-  
20 numbered year elections by electing each position to one term that is  
21 one year shorter in duration than provided by law. After conclusion  
22 of that term, beginning in an odd-numbered year, elections for  
23 positions must be for their prescribed term lengths.

24 (e) An ordinance, charter amendment, or policy must be adopted by  
25 January 15th of an odd-numbered year for the city, town, or special  
26 purpose district to begin transition under (b) of this subsection in  
27 that calendar year.

28 **Sec. 3.** RCW 35.17.020 and 2013 c 11 s 87 are each amended to  
29 read as follows:

30 (1) All regular elections in cities organized under the statutory  
31 commission form of government shall be held quadrennially in the odd-  
32 numbered years on the dates provided in RCW 29A.04.330, except for  
33 cities that are moving or have moved their regular elections to even-  
34 numbered years under RCW 29A.04.330. ((However, after commissioners  
35 are elected at the next general election occurring in 1995 or 1997,  
36 regular elections in cities organized under a statutory commission  
37 form of government shall be held biennially at municipal general  
38 elections.))

1 (2) The commissioners shall be nominated and elected at large.  
2 Their terms shall be for four years, unless the city is transitioning  
3 its regular elections to even-numbered years as provided by RCW  
4 29A.04.330, and until their successors are elected and qualified and  
5 assume office in accordance with RCW 29A.60.280. However, at the next  
6 regular election of a city organized under a statutory commission  
7 form of government, the terms of office of commissioners shall occur  
8 with the person who is elected as a commissioner receiving the least  
9 number of votes being elected to a two-year term of office and the  
10 other two persons who are elected being elected to four-year terms of  
11 office. Thereafter, commissioners shall be elected to four-year terms  
12 of office.

13 (3) Vacancies on a commission shall occur and shall be filled as  
14 provided in chapter 42.12 RCW.

15 **Sec. 4.** RCW 35.18.270 and 1994 c 223 s 13 are each amended to  
16 read as follows:

17 If the majority of the votes cast at a special election for  
18 organization on the council-manager plan favor the plan, the city or  
19 town shall elect the council required under the council-manager plan  
20 in number according to its population at the next municipal general  
21 election. However, special elections shall be held to nominate and  
22 elect the new city councilmembers at the next primary and general  
23 election held in an even-numbered year if the next municipal general  
24 election is more than one year after the date of the election at  
25 which the voters approved the council-manager plan, unless the city  
26 or town is moving or has moved its regularly scheduled elections to  
27 even-numbered years as provided by RCW 29A.04.330, in which case it  
28 shall hold regular elections rather than special elections. The  
29 staggering of terms of office shall occur at the election when the  
30 new councilmembers are elected, where the simple majority of the  
31 persons elected as councilmembers receiving the greatest numbers of  
32 votes shall be elected to four-year terms of office if the election  
33 is held in an odd-numbered year, or three-year terms of office if the  
34 election is a special election held in an even-numbered year, and the  
35 remainder of the persons elected as councilmembers shall be elected  
36 to two-year terms of office if the election is held in an odd-  
37 numbered year, or one-year terms of office if the election is a  
38 special election held in an even-numbered year. The initial  
39 councilmembers shall take office immediately when they are elected

1 and qualified, but the lengths of their terms of office shall be  
2 calculated from the first day in January in the year following the  
3 election.

4 **Sec. 5.** RCW 35.23.051 and 2019 c 454 s 5 are each amended to  
5 read as follows:

6 General municipal elections in second-class cities shall be held  
7 biennially in the odd-numbered years and shall be subject to general  
8 election law, unless a second-class city is moving or has moved its  
9 general municipal elections to even-numbered years under the process  
10 provided for in RCW 29A.04.330.

11 The terms of office of the mayor, city attorney, clerk, and  
12 treasurer shall be four years and until their successors are elected  
13 and qualified and assume office in accordance with RCW 29A.60.280,  
14 unless the second-class city is transitioning its general municipal  
15 elections to even-numbered years as provided by RCW 29A.04.330:  
16 PROVIDED, That if the offices of city attorney, clerk, and treasurer  
17 are made appointive, the city attorney, clerk, and treasurer shall  
18 not be appointed for a definite term: PROVIDED FURTHER, That the term  
19 of the elected treasurer shall not commence in the same biennium in  
20 which the term of the mayor commences, nor in which the terms of the  
21 city attorney and clerk commence if they are elected.

22 Council positions shall be numbered in each second-class city so  
23 that council position seven has a two-year term of office and council  
24 positions one through six shall each have four-year terms of office.  
25 Each councilmember shall remain in office until a successor is  
26 elected and qualified and assumes office in accordance with RCW  
27 29A.60.280.

28 In its discretion the council of a second-class city may divide  
29 the city by ordinance, into a convenient number of wards, not  
30 exceeding six, fix the boundaries of the wards, and change the ward  
31 boundaries from time to time and as provided in RCW 29A.76.010. No  
32 change in the boundaries of any ward shall be made within one hundred  
33 twenty days next before the date of a general municipal election, nor  
34 within twenty months after the wards have been established or altered  
35 unless pursuant to RCW 29A.92.040 or 29A.92.110. However, if a  
36 boundary change results in one ward being represented by more  
37 councilmembers than the number to which it is entitled, those having  
38 the shortest unexpired terms shall be assigned by the council to  
39 wards where there is a vacancy, and the councilmembers so assigned

1 shall be deemed to be residents of the wards to which they are  
2 assigned for purposes of determining whether those positions are  
3 vacant.

4 Whenever such city is so divided into wards, the city council  
5 shall designate by ordinance the number of councilmembers to be  
6 elected from each ward, apportioning the same in proportion to the  
7 population of the wards. Thereafter the councilmembers so designated  
8 shall be elected by the voters resident in such ward, or by general  
9 vote of the whole city as may be designated in such ordinance.  
10 Council position seven shall not be associated with a ward and the  
11 person elected to that position may reside anywhere in the city and  
12 voters throughout the city may vote at a primary to nominate  
13 candidates for position seven, when a primary is necessary, and at a  
14 general election to elect the person to council position seven.  
15 Additional territory that is added to the city shall, by act of the  
16 council, be annexed to contiguous wards without affecting the right  
17 to redistrict at the expiration of twenty months after last previous  
18 division. The removal of a councilmember from the ward for which he  
19 or she was elected shall create a vacancy in such office.

20 Wards shall be redrawn as provided in chapter 29A.76 RCW. Wards  
21 shall be used as follows: (1) Only a resident of the ward may be a  
22 candidate for, or hold office as, a councilmember of the ward; and  
23 (2) only voters of the ward may vote at a primary to nominate  
24 candidates for a councilmember of the ward. Voters of the entire city  
25 may vote at the general election to elect a councilmember of a ward,  
26 unless the city had prior to January 1, 1994, limited the voting in  
27 the general election for any or all council positions to only voters  
28 residing within the ward associated with the council positions. If a  
29 city had so limited the voting in the general election to only voters  
30 residing within the ward, then the city shall be authorized to  
31 continue to do so. The elections for the remaining council position  
32 or council positions that are not associated with a ward shall be  
33 conducted as if the wards did not exist.

34 **Sec. 6.** RCW 35.27.090 and 2009 c 549 s 2056 are each amended to  
35 read as follows:

36 All general municipal elections in towns shall be held biennially  
37 in the odd-numbered years as provided in RCW 29A.04.330, except in  
38 towns that are moving or have moved their regular elections to even-  
39 numbered years under RCW 29A.04.330. The term of office of the mayor

1 and treasurer shall be four years and until their successors are  
2 elected and qualified and assume office in accordance with RCW  
3 (~~29A.20.040~~) 29A.60.280, unless the town is transitioning its  
4 general municipal elections to even-numbered years as provided by RCW  
5 29A.04.330: PROVIDED, That the term of the treasurer shall not  
6 commence in the same biennium in which the term of the mayor  
7 commences. Councilmembers shall be elected for four-year terms,  
8 unless the town is transitioning its general municipal elections to  
9 even-numbered years as provided by RCW 29A.04.330, and until their  
10 successors are elected and qualified and assume office in accordance  
11 with RCW (~~29A.20.040~~) 29A.60.280; three at one election and two at  
12 the next succeeding biennial election.

13 **Sec. 7.** RCW 35.30.080 and 2015 c 53 s 42 are each amended to  
14 read as follows:

15 (1) When a majority of the legislative body of an unclassified  
16 city determines that it would serve the best interests and general  
17 welfare of such municipality to change the election procedures of  
18 such city to the procedures specified in this section, such  
19 legislative body may, by resolution, declare its intention to adopt  
20 such procedures for the city. Such resolution must be adopted at  
21 least one hundred eighty days before the general municipal election  
22 at which the new election procedures are implemented. Within ten days  
23 after the passage of the resolution, the legislative body shall cause  
24 it to be published at least once in a newspaper of general  
25 circulation within the city.

26 (2) All general municipal elections in an unclassified city  
27 adopting a resolution under subsection (1) of this section shall be  
28 held biennially (~~in the odd-numbered years~~) as provided in RCW  
29 29A.04.330 and shall be held in accordance with the general election  
30 laws of the state. An unclassified city may hold its general  
31 municipal elections in even-numbered years under RCW 29A.04.330 but  
32 remains obligated to comply with the requirements of this section.

33 The term of the treasurer shall not commence in the same biennium  
34 in which the term of the mayor commences. Candidates for the city  
35 council shall run for specific council positions. The staggering of  
36 terms of city officers shall be established at the first election,  
37 where the simple majority of the persons elected as councilmembers  
38 receiving the greatest numbers of votes shall be elected to four-year  
39 terms of office and the remainder of the persons elected as

1 councilmembers and the treasurer shall be elected to two-year terms  
2 of office. Thereafter, all elected city officers shall be elected for  
3 four-year terms and until their successors are elected and qualified  
4 and assume office in accordance with RCW 29A.60.280.

5 **Sec. 8.** RCW 35A.02.050 and 2015 c 53 s 48 are each amended to  
6 read as follows:

7 The first election of officers where required for reorganization  
8 under a different general plan of government newly adopted in a  
9 manner provided in RCW 35A.02.020, 35A.02.030, 35A.06.030, or  
10 35A.06.060, as now or hereafter amended, shall be at the next general  
11 municipal election if one is to be held more than ninety days but not  
12 more than one hundred (~~and~~) eighty days after certification of a  
13 reorganization ordinance or resolution, or otherwise at a special  
14 election to be held for that purpose in accordance with RCW  
15 29A.04.330, unless the city or town is moving or has moved its  
16 regularly scheduled elections to even-numbered years as provided by  
17 RCW 29A.04.330, in which case it shall hold regular elections rather  
18 than special elections. In the event that the first election of  
19 officers is to be held at a general municipal election, such election  
20 shall be preceded by a primary election pursuant to RCW 29A.52.210  
21 and 29A.04.311. In the event that the first election of all officers  
22 is to be held at a special election rather than at a general  
23 election, and notwithstanding any provisions of any other law to the  
24 contrary, such special election shall be preceded by a primary  
25 election to be held on a date authorized by RCW 29A.04.321, and the  
26 persons nominated at that primary election shall be voted upon at the  
27 next succeeding special election that is authorized by RCW  
28 29A.04.321: PROVIDED, That in the event the ordinances calling for  
29 reclassification or reclassification and reorganization under the  
30 provisions of (~~Title 35A RCW~~) this title have been filed with the  
31 secretary of state pursuant to RCW 35A.02.040 for a special election  
32 in an even-numbered year at least ninety days prior to a state  
33 general election then the election of new officers shall be  
34 concurrent with the state primary and general election and shall be  
35 conducted as set forth in general election law.

36 Upon reorganization, candidates for all offices shall file or be  
37 nominated for and successful candidates shall be elected to specific  
38 council positions. The initial terms of office for those elected at a  
39 first election of all officers shall be as follows: (1) A simple

1 majority of the persons who are elected as councilmembers receiving  
2 the greatest numbers of votes and the mayor in a city with a mayor-  
3 council plan of government shall be elected to four-year terms of  
4 office, if the election is held in an odd-numbered year, or three-  
5 year terms of office, if the election is held in an even-numbered  
6 year except in the case of special elections in an even-numbered  
7 year, when terms are three years; and (2) the other persons who are  
8 elected as councilmembers shall be elected to two-year terms of  
9 office, if the election is held in an odd-numbered year, or one-year  
10 terms of office, if the election is held in an even-numbered year  
11 except in the case of special elections in an even-numbered year,  
12 when terms are one year. The newly elected officials shall take  
13 office immediately when they are elected and qualified, but the  
14 length of their terms of office shall be calculated from the first  
15 day of January in the year following the election. Thereafter, each  
16 person elected as a councilmember or mayor in a city with a mayor-  
17 council plan of government shall be elected to a four-year term of  
18 office. Each councilmember and mayor in a city with a mayor-council  
19 plan of government shall serve until a successor is elected and  
20 qualified and assumes office as provided in RCW 29A.60.280.

21 The former officers shall, upon the election and qualification of  
22 new officers, deliver to the proper officers of the reorganized  
23 noncharter code city all books of record, documents and papers in  
24 their possession belonging to such municipal corporation before the  
25 reorganization thereof.

26 **Sec. 9.** RCW 3.50.040 and 2002 c 136 s 2 are each amended to read  
27 as follows:

28 Within thirty days after the effective date of the ordinance  
29 creating the municipal court, the mayor of each city or town shall  
30 appoint a municipal judge or judges of the municipal court for a term  
31 of four years. The terms of judges serving on July 1, 1984, and  
32 municipal judges who are appointed to terms commencing before January  
33 1, 1986, shall expire January 1, 1986. The terms of their successors  
34 shall commence on January 1, 1986, and on January 1 of each fourth  
35 year thereafter, pursuant to appointment or election as provided in  
36 this chapter. Term lengths for municipal judges may be modified to  
37 comply with RCW 29A.04.330(6). Appointments shall be made on or  
38 before December 1 of the year next preceding the year in which the  
39 terms commence.

1 The legislative authority of a city or town that has the general  
2 power of confirmation over mayoral appointments shall have the power  
3 to confirm the appointment of a municipal judge.

4 A person appointed as a full-time or part-time municipal judge  
5 shall be a citizen of the United States of America and of the state  
6 of Washington; and an attorney admitted to practice law before the  
7 courts of record of the state of Washington: PROVIDED, That in a  
8 municipality having a population less than five thousand persons, a  
9 person who has taken and passed by January 1, 2003, the qualifying  
10 examination for a lay candidate for judicial officer as provided by  
11 rule of the supreme court may be the judge. Any city or town shall  
12 have authority to appoint a district judge as its municipal judge  
13 when the municipal judge is not required to serve full time. In the  
14 event of the appointment of a district judge, the city or town shall  
15 pay a pro rata share of the salary.

16 **Sec. 10.** RCW 3.50.050 and 1984 c 258 s 107 are each amended to  
17 read as follows:

18 The legislative authority of the city or town may, by ordinance,  
19 provide that the position of municipal judge within the city or town  
20 shall be an elective position. The ordinance shall provide for the  
21 qualifications of the municipal judge which shall be the same as the  
22 qualifications necessary for the appointment thereof; and further,  
23 shall provide that the municipal judge shall be elected in the same  
24 manner as other elective city officials are elected to office, and  
25 that the term of the municipal judge shall be for a term of four  
26 years commencing on January 1, 1986, and every four years thereafter.  
27 Term lengths for municipal judges may be modified to comply with RCW  
28 29A.04.330(6).

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