
Local Government Committee

HB 1390

Brief Description: Authorizing instant runoff voting.

Sponsors: Representatives Moeller, Jarrett, Lovick, Fromhold, Veloria, Kessler, Pettigrew, Miloscia, McDermott, Dunshee, Upthegrove, DeBolt, Wallace, Wood, Sullivan, Schual-Berke, Kagi and Nixon.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Adopts the instant runoff system of voting in Washington for all applicable elections.
- Authorizes instant runoff voting procedures for use in first class cities as an optional method of election for nonpartisan city offices.
- Replaces primary elections in cities choosing to use the instant runoff voting system with general elections conducted under instant runoff voting procedures.
- Repeals statutory criteria for qualifying nonpartisan candidates for general elections.

Hearing Date: 2/5/03

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

Cities and towns in Washington are classified according to population at the time of organization (usually incorporation) or reorganization. A first class city is a city with a population of at least 10,000 inhabitants at the time of incorporation or reorganization that has adopted a charter.

"Instant runoff voting" or IRV, is an election method requiring candidates to receive a majority, rather than a plurality, of the votes cast in a particular race. While requirements vary under IRV, voters may select more than one candidate for a single race and rank candidates in a preferential order. A candidate receiving a majority of "first choice" votes is elected. If no candidate receives a majority of the votes cast in the race after the first counting stage, the "second choice" votes indicated on the ballots cast for the candidate receiving the fewest votes become additional votes for the candidates indicated in those ballot choices. This process generally continues until a candidate receives a majority of the votes

cast for the position or until all but one candidate has been eliminated.

Provisions for IRV do not exist in Washington law.

Present statute provides that city and town primary elections are nonpartisan and are held when more than two candidates file for the same position. Generally, if a primary was held for a nonpartisan office, the general election ballot must contain the names of the two candidates receiving the highest vote totals, listed in that order. A candidate must receive at least one percent of the votes cast for the office being sought in the primary in order to advance to the general election ballot. If no primary was held, the order of the candidate names for the general election ballot is determined by a lot drawing by the county filing officer. The candidate receiving the highest vote total in the general election is elected to the office.

Summary of Bill:

The instant runoff voting system (IRV) is adopted in Washington for all applicable elections. A first class city may use IRV for its elections if adopted by appropriate action of its governing body. Primaries for all nonpartisan offices in first class cities choosing to use IRV are replaced with general elections conducted according to specified IRV procedures.

"Instant runoff voting" is defined as a system of voting whereby voters may rank three or more candidates for the same office in order of preference, for as many of the candidates for the office as they wish, up to the maximum number of choices allowed.

The IRV counting procedures specify that a candidate is elected upon receiving a majority of the votes cast for a race. If no candidate receives a majority of votes after the initial counting stage, the last place candidate is eliminated. The second highest ranked choices on the ballots for an eliminated candidate become votes for the candidates so designated in those choices. This process continues through each preferential ranking until a candidate receives a majority of the votes or until all but one candidate remains.

Provisions for ballot specifications and directions are included. Election officials may provide for electronic sorting and tabulating ballots, and modifications to ballots and directions if the changes are consistent with the delineated provisions and purposes. IRV election results are applied to a specific contested election statute.

The statute providing for the qualifying of nonpartisan candidates for general elections, including provisions for candidate listing order, and the one-percent primary election vote requirement, is repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 24, 2003.

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