

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6000

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 07, 2008

Title: An act relating to establishing the option to use ranked choice voting by cities and local taxing districts.

Brief Description: Allowing ranked choice voting by cities and local taxing districts.

Sponsors: Senators Swecker, Kline, Benton and Kilmer.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/07/08 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Oemig, Vice Chair; Benton, Kline, McDermott and Pridemore.

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

Background: City, town, and special district officers are nominated and elected as nonpartisan officers. 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 1 percent of the votes cast for the office being sought in the primary in order to advance to the general election ballot. The candidate receiving the highest vote total in the general election is elected to the office.

In 2005 the Legislature authorized certain qualified cities to conduct a five-year pilot project to use instant runoff voting for nonpartisan offices. To date, no city has exercised the instant runoff voting pilot program authority.

In 2006 the voters of Pierce County approved a charter amendment to use instant runoff voting to elect county officials starting in 2008.

Instant runoff voting, or ranked choice voting, is a system of voting which allows voters to designate candidates for the same office in order of preference by indicating a first choice, second choice, third choice, and so forth. If no candidate receives a majority of first choice votes after the initial tabulation of ballots, then the candidate with the lowest total of first choice votes is eliminated. On ballots where the first choice candidate was eliminated, second

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choice votes will be counted for the designated candidate. This process continues through each preferential ranking until a candidate receives a majority of the votes.

Summary of Bill: Any local government may adopt ranked choice voting as a method for electing candidates for nonpartisan offices of the local government. The local government must adopt ranked voting by charter amendment if applicable, or by action of the local government's legislative body.

The primary for any local government that adopts ranked choice voting is eliminated.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This is a good bill that gives an option to local jurisdictions to run an election in the ranked choice manner. This bill would only impact six counties, all of them charter counties. It's a cumbersome process to adopt this type of voting method so it is not as though the state would have every county adopting this method. Using rank choice voting saves money as it does away with the primary and places all candidates on the ballot. This type of voting opens up choices for voters. Pierce County voters solidly support this option and have passed the necessary legislation to adopt it. Please give all additional counties this option.

CON: This method of voting has only recently been adopted by Pierce County and has not actually been utilized yet. Let's give this a chance, see how it works and then decide if this is a good idea for additional counties. Implementing ranked choice voting has been incredibly complicated and difficult. It would be prudent to wait and see what happens in Pierce County before we move forward to additional jurisdictions.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Toni McKinley, Richard Anderson Connolly, Citizens for a Better Ballot; Michael Garvison, Skamania County Auditor; Ruth Bennett, Pierce County Blue Ribbon Panel on Ranked Choice Voting and Libertarian Party of Washington.

CON: Shane Hamlin, Secretary of State; Kevin Phelps, citizen.