

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1474

As of March 19, 2013

Title: An act relating to giving general election voters the power to choose between the top two candidates for nonpartisan offices.

Brief Description: Giving general election voters the power to choose between the top two candidates for nonpartisan offices.

Sponsors: Representatives Pedersen, Rodne, Goodman, Buys, Hunt, Hunter, Hudgins, Carlyle, Fey and Pollet.

Brief History: Passed House: 3/07/13, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Governmental Operations: 3/19/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: Since voters approved Initiative 872 in 2004, Washington has utilized a top-two primary election system. Candidates filing for local, state, and congressional partisan office list a party preference. Voters do not need to declare a party affiliation and, for each race, voters may vote for any candidate in the race. The two candidates in each race who receive the most votes, and at least 1 percent of the overall vote, advance to the general election.

The offices of justice of the Washington Supreme Court, judges of the court of appeals, judges of the superior court, and Superintendent of Public Instruction are nonpartisan. In elections for these offices, if a candidate receives a majority of the votes at the primary election, only the candidate's name may appear on the general election ballot. Due to this exception, many races for these offices are decided at the primary election.

Summary of Bill: The names of the two candidates who receive the most votes in the primary election for a judicial office or for Superintendent of Public Instruction must appear on the general election ballot, regardless of whether a candidate in that race receives a majority of votes cast in the primary election.

Appropriation: None.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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: Judges ought to be elected by the broader general election pool. We had a number of situations in which primary elections decided races. It is hard on voters at the general election to see that their choices were eliminated. Turnout at the primary is less than half of what it is at the general election.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Pedersen, prime sponsor; Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State.