

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5723

As of February 10, 2023

Title: An act relating to giving cities and towns the freedom to switch their general elections to even-numbered years to take advantage of higher and more diverse voter turnout.

Brief Description: Giving cities and towns the freedom to switch their general elections to even-numbered years.

Sponsors: Senators Valdez, Kuderer, Dhingra, Frame, Hasegawa, Keiser, Lias, Lovelett, Nguyen, Nobles, Pedersen, Randall, Shewmake and Stanford.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government & Elections: 2/10/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes and sets procedures for cities and towns to hold their regular elections in even-numbered years.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: Every November, the state holds a statewide general election. In even-numbered years, the election includes general elections for federal, state, and county officers. In odd-numbered years, general elections are held for city, town, and special district officers, with a few exceptions, as well as elections to fill any vacancies. State and local ballot measures such as initiatives, referenda, and constitutional amendments can appear on the ballot in any year.

Summary of Bill: Cities and towns may choose to hold their regular elections in even-numbered years.

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.

Administrative Procedures. A move to even-year elections may be done by passage of an ordinance or voter approval of a referendum. If the city or town chooses to pass an ordinance to move to even-year elections, it must hold two public hearings at least 30 days apart to consider public input. The city or town may not vote to adopt the ordinance until at least 30 days after the second public hearing. A city or town's adoption of even-year elections is irrevocable.

Transition to Even-Year Elections. To transition to even-year elections, the city or town must elect all its positions to one term is that is one year shorter than it would ordinarily be. After the conclusion of that term—in an even-numbered year—future terms for that position will be at their customary length. The ordinance or referendum must specify at which odd-year election positions will be elected to shortened terms.

The ordinance or referendum switching to even-year elections must be adopted by January 15th for elections for shortened terms to take place in that calendar year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 7, 2023.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: More people vote in even year elections. This bill will allow local jurisdictions to opt-in to holding their elections in even-numbered years. This is expected to increase turnout for local elections by 30-50%. The cumulative increase in turnout from many recent measures passed, such as the future voter program and same-day voter registration, has been 10%. Voters prefer even-year elections; every city putting this on the ballot has seen it passed. This is not partisan—increase in turnout will occur across party lines. This is backed up by strong research. Even year elections will close a gap in representation by supporting larger turn-out. Odd-year elections see lower turnout among young and BIPOC voters. Every candidate deserves the opportunity to be elected by the most representative electorate. This will save administrative costs.

CON: Voters know when elections occur. Changing the system will cause disruption, confuse voters, and be an underhanded effort to pressure local jurisdictions. Municipal judges request to be excluded from the bill. All judges run on the same time frame, and having certain cities elect judges one year while their neighbors elect the judges the next year would be disruptive and create a possible conflict with the state constitution.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Javier Valdez, Prime Sponsor; Kathy Sakahara, Northwest Progressive Institute; Zoltan Hajnal; Anna Fahey, Sightline Institute; Jazmine Smith, The Washington Bus; Chris Roberts, Councilmember, City of Shoreline; Kenia

Peregrino, Washington for Equitable Representation; Lindsey Schromen-Wawrin, Councilmember, City of Port Angeles.

CON: Tim Eyman; Judge Kevin Ringus, District & Municipal Court Judges Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: PRO: Denisse Guerrero, WA Community Alliance; Joseph Lachman, Asian Counseling and Referral Service.