

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5069

As of February 3, 2025

Title: An act relating to requiring the secretary of state to print and distribute a voters' pamphlet for the primary in each even-numbered year and for the general election every year.

Brief Description: Requiring the secretary of state to print and distribute a voters' pamphlet for the primary in each even-numbered year and for the general election every year.

Sponsors: Senators Valdez, Dozier, Chapman, Cleveland, Hasegawa, Liias, Nobles and Riccelli; by request of Secretary of State.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections: 1/14/25, 1/17/25 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Ways & Means: 2/03/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that the secretary of state produce a voters' pamphlet prior to the primary in each even-numbered year.
- Requires that the secretary of state produce a voters' pamphlet prior to the general election every year.
- Provides that local voters' pamphlets are not required to provide information on measures and candidates appearing in a voters' pamphlet produced by the secretary of state.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL AFFAIRS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Valdez, Chair; Krishnadasan, Vice Chair; Wilson, J., Ranking Member; Kauffman and Riccelli.

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.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Hasegawa and Short.

Staff: William Bridges (786-7312)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: When Elections Are Held. General elections are held every November. In even-numbered years, the general election is for federal, state, and county officers, as well as state or local ballot measures such as initiatives, referenda, and constitutional amendments. There are exceptions, some charter counties—such as King, Snohomish, and Whatcom—hold their county executive elections in odd years. King County, following the passage of a charter amendment in 2022, will be moving their county executive elections to even years beginning in 2026.

In odd-numbered years, general elections are held for city, town, and special purpose district officers.

State ballot measures must appear on the ballot at the next regular general election, and therefore they may appear in either even- or odd-numbered years. Special elections and recall elections also may occur in either even- or odd-numbered years.

State Voters' Pamphlet. The Washington Constitution requires the secretary of state (Secretary) to send a publication containing ballot measures referred to the people, along with arguments for and against the measure, to each individual place of residence in the state. By statute, the Secretary must print and distribute a voters' pamphlet if a statewide measure or candidate appears on the general election ballot. The statewide voters' pamphlet must contain specific information, such as statements submitted by federal and state candidates and information about each measure initiated by or referred to the people.

Local Voters' Pamphlet. Each county auditor must produce a local voters' pamphlet for the entire county, which must be printed and distributed before any primary, general or special election. The local voters' pamphlet must contain specific information on all measures and candidates appearing on the ballots within that county.

Summary of Bill: The Secretary is required to print and distribute a voters' pamphlet prior to the primary in each even-numbered year and prior to the general election every year. Local voters' pamphlets printed and distributed by county auditors are not required to provide information on measures and candidates appearing in a voters' pamphlet produced by the Secretary.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on January 1, 2026.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections):

PRO: This is a WACO priority bill because it will assist those counties with limited financial and personnel resources to produce voter pamphlets. The bill will result in a consistent pamphlet throughout the state. The bill will allow a greater opportunity to provide the public with election information.

CON: The bill should be amended to allow different candidate statements for the primary and general election pamphlets.

OTHER: Signed in as con but then changed to other because there were no concerns.

Persons Testifying (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections): PRO: Senator Javier Valdez, Prime Sponsor; Steve Hobbs, Office of Secretary of State; Michael Shaw, Washington Association of County Officials (WACO); Conner Edwards, Professional Campaign Treasurer/CG Edwards PLLC; Heidi Hunt, Auditors Association/Adams County Auditor.

CON: Tim Eyman, Initiative Activist.

OTHER: Laurie Layne.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (State Government, Tribal Affairs & Elections): No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: There is no statewide primary voters' pamphlet, and voters complain about this. Some counties can't afford to do much for a primary voters' pamphlet and have limited staff. It would be best to get the same information to all voters and have the same staff create the pamphlet. Voters need this access to information—rural counties do not have daily local distribution of newspapers, and many voters don't have reliable Internet access. It will be easier for smaller, rural counties to produce local voters' pamphlets if they only have to focus on local, not state, elections. Allowing candidates to change statements after the primary election would raise costs, could delay distribution, and open the door for uncivil statements.

CON: We suggest an amendment to give candidates who advance from the primary election the ability to submit a new statement for the general election pamphlet. It makes sense to get updated information to voters, and doesn't favor incumbents or challengers unfairly.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Heidi Hunt, Adams County Auditor / WA Assoc of County Auditors; Mike Shaw, WA Association of County Officials; Brian Hatfield, Office of Secretary of State; Stuart Holmes, Office of Secretary of State.

CON: Tim EYMAN, Initiative activist.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means): No one.