



Charter Review Commission

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Date: December 14, 2020
From: Clallam County Charter Review Commission
To: Clallam County Board of County Commissioners

Request from Clallam County Charter Review Commissioner to Clallam County Commissioners to pass a resolution calling on the state legislature to pass legislation, which would enable the County (and other jurisdictions in the state) to adopt ranked-choice voting for local elections, if they so choose.

Clallam County Charter Review Commission: Recommendation in Favor of Legislation for Ranked-Choice Voting

WHEREAS, an engaged electorate is foundational to the healthy civic life of the community; and

WHEREAS, voter turnout in our primary elections is, without exception, significantly lower than in the general election, and is not reflective of the general electorate; and

WHEREAS, reasons for voter disengagement may include: fear of wasting your vote on a candidate who is not "electable"; pressure to vote tactically for the "lesser of two evils" rather than for the candidate you actually like best; limited choices on the general election ballot; negative campaigning; feeling that your vote doesn't matter; and

WHEREAS, an alternative to our "Top Two" primary system is Ranked-Choice Voting (RCV), whereby instead of being limited to choosing just one candidate in a given race, voters are empowered to rank as many candidates as they like in order of their preference (e.g., 1st choice, 2nd choice, 3rd choice); each voter has only one vote, but can indicate their backup choices; and

WHEREAS, with RCV, voters know that if their 1st choice doesn't have enough support to win, their vote will count for their 2nd choice; if their 2nd choice is defeated, their vote will count for their 3rd choice, and so on;

WHEREAS, using RCV means that the primary and the general elections can be combined into a single, high-turnout election; and

WHEREAS, demonstrated benefits of RCV include:

- saves costs for jurisdictions by preventing costly and low-turnout primary elections;
- frees voters to choose their true favorite candidate without fear of throwing away their vote;
- encourages more candidates to run because they won't fear "splitting the vote" with other similar candidates, or being a "spoiler";
- encourages candidates to reach out to more voters and build a broad coalition of support to win;
- reduces political polarization and mudslinging, and promotes civil, issue-oriented campaigns; and

WHEREAS, more than twenty U.S. jurisdictions have adopted some version of ranked-choice voting, including Minneapolis (MN), New York City (NY), Santa Fe (NM), Memphis (TN), Oakland (CA), Payson (UT), Boulder (CO), Takoma Park (MD), Benton County (OR), and the State of Maine; and

WHEREAS, in 2007, Clallam County voters were able to consider a charter amendment that would have adopted ranked-choice voting for County elections; and

WHEREAS, today, Clallam County voters no longer have the option to consider adopting ranked-choice voting, because Washington state law presently mandates a "Top Two" primary system for all jurisdictions that effectively prohibits them from adopting RCV; and

WHEREAS, two bills currently before the Washington State Legislature, HB 1722 and SB 5708 (the "Local Options Bill") as they are presently drafted, would amend state law to give local jurisdictions the option to adopt RCV; and

WHEREAS, HB 1722 and SB 5708 are merely permissive bills which do not dictate or impose any policies upon any jurisdictions, but simply provide jurisdictions with the ability, should they choose, to adopt RCV.

THEREFORE, THE CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION RECOMMENDS that the Clallam County Board of County Commissioners pass a resolution calling on the state legislature to pass legislation, which would enable the County (and other jurisdictions in the state) to adopt ranked-choice voting for local elections, if they so choose.

Sue Erzen
Chair - Charter Review Commission

Therese Stokan
Commissioner - Charter Review Commission
Sponsor of Choice-Ranked Voting