

2020 ISSUE PAPER: ELECTIONS

Position Statement

The League of Women Voters of Washington believes that:

- EL-2:** Voting procedures should serve the voter with a maximum of convenience, simplicity and efficiency while ensuring that the requirements of secrecy, accuracy and impartiality are maintained.
- EL-4:** Regular and full disclosure of campaign finances for both ballot issues and candidates is necessary before primary and general elections.
- LE-1:** The length and operation of the state legislature should encourage the participation of “citizen” legislators.

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- EM-1:** Supports state election laws allowing for more options for alternative election systems in governmental jurisdictions at both the state and local levels.
- EM-2:** Believes that consideration should be given, when evaluating election systems, to how well they promote “representative-ness”, citizen participation and accountability, as well as keeping the cost of elections within range by holding them in regularly scheduled General or Special Elections. supports state election laws allowing for more options for alternative election systems in governmental jurisdictions at both the state and local levels.
- EM-6:** Supports the concept of a majority vote requirement for winners of single offices such as mayor or governor, as long as it is achieved using a voting method such as the Instant Runoff Vote, rather than a second, separate runoff election.

Voter Access

Voting rights for those previously convicted of a felony (SB 5076 and HB 1924) Currently, voting rights are restored to those with a felony conviction only after they who are no longer under community custody (“parole”). Further that right can be revoked if they fall behind on paying their legal financial obligations (LFOs). We support having these rights restored upon release from prison and eliminating the connection to LFOs because it disproportionately disenfranchises those with low incomes. It turns voting into a “pay to play” system, which we believe is antithetical to our democracy.

Eliminating Advisory Votes (SB 5224) In 2008, Initiative 960 was passed by voters and included a section requiring that whenever the legislature raised taxes, the ballot for the next general election would include an opportunity for voters to express **their opinion** as to whether or not the tax increase should be repealed or maintained. The ballot does not indicate that the outcome of this vote is in no way binding on the legislature. Because the vote has no impact, there is virtually no information about them available to voters. Information that is available is what is required by this law to be included in the state’s Voters’ Pamphlet. This includes a short description of the tax increase, 10-year cost projection, and the record of the vote on the bill that contained the tax increase. The Voter’s pamphlet does not include any reference to the reason for the increase or information about how the money is being used.

These questions add significantly to the cost of the election, in some cases this cost is more than the amount of the day tax increase itself. In addition to printing, postage and tallying cost, these opinion polls have a major impact on the cost of the statewide Voters Pamphlet. In odd numbered years where there are no state races or ballot questions, only advisory votes, the pamphlet providing information only about the advisory votes must still be sent

to every household in the state.

Ranked Choice Voting (HB 1722/SB 5708)

Washington currently uses a single-member, winner-take-all election system, electing the person with the most votes regardless of how well they represent their electorate. This system has led to a number of problems including lack of representation for minority groups, winners without majority support, and elections won by less popular candidates because of vote splitting.

Most other democracies in the world use different methods for electing their representatives: proportional representation (PR) and/or ranked choice voting (RCV), sometimes known as instant runoff voting (IRV). These alternatives reduce the power of gerrymandering, wasted votes, and negative campaigning. They eliminate spoilers and strategic voting, allow for more robust participation by third parties, and result in more diverse representation. These companion bills will allow local jurisdictions to circumvent the Top Two Primary system and implement RCV for the general. The LWVWA has supported this bill since its introduction and intends to continue to do so, with additional League efforts undertaken to educate representatives and the public about alternative voting systems.

Other Democracy Issues

Please see separate pages for more information on democracy issues that LWV WA lobbies on including **campaign finance & government ethics, election security, and census and redistricting.**

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