

Local Options Bill Background Information

The Ranked Choice Voting Local Options bill sponsored by Representatives Steve Elkins (DFL Bloomington) and Mike Freiberg (DFL-Golden Valley) had its first 2019 hearing on 2/20/2019 with the House Subcommittee on Elections. It was included and passed in the 2019 Government Operations omnibus bill. A Senate companion bill (SF 2424) was introduced during the 2019 session by Rep. Kent Eken, DFL-Twin Valley. The Minnesota Senate did not hear any election bills in 2019.

The local options bill would give any city, school district, etc., the right to use RCV if they wish, without having to ask the Legislature for permission. This bill would free statutory jurisdictions to use Ranked Choice Voting if they choose, and allow charter cities to approve RCV by ordinance. It also would establish guidelines to ensure that the next generation of voting equipment is RCV-capable. The bill would impose no mandates and has no effect whatsoever on communities uninterested in pursuing RCV.

In Minnesota, only 15% of our cities have the option to set their own rules for their local elections. The remaining 85% of cities, all townships, all school districts, all soil & water boards, and all counties except Ramsey, would have to ask the Minnesota Legislature for permission to use Ranked Choice Voting for their elections.

Community members have asked the Hopkins School Board to consider a resolution of support for this measure, as it aligns with our LAC platform plank on local control.

Draft resolution:

A Resolution Supporting Local Control for Local Elections

WHEREAS, all townships and school districts, 86 of 87 counties, and 85 percent of cities fall under the statutory rule for the conduct of local elections and must ask permission of the Legislature to make changes to these rules; and

WHEREAS, local charter (or home rule) cities that hold elections in even years along with state and federal elections must comply with restrictive state partisan ballot design requirements; and

WHEREAS, there are no consistent rules for the administration of Ranked Choice Voting in local jurisdictions in Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, the Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) Local Options bill aims to remove regulatory barriers and extend the authority to adopt Ranked Choice Voting to local statutory jurisdictions; and

WHEREAS, the RCV Local Options bill contains no mandates; and

WHEREAS, the RCV Local Options bill provides for the flexibility to efficiently include ranked and non-ranked elections on a single ballot; and

WHEREAS, the RCV Local Options bill provides consistent standards for the administration of RCV in cities that choose to use it; and

WHEREAS, the League of Minnesota Cities supports the need for consistent RCV rules for use in Minnesota cities for both even and odd-year local elections; and

WHEREAS, the RCV local options bill contain no mandates, but simply provides local jurisdictions with the permission and tools they need to consider and implement RCV if we wish; and

WHEREAS, a growing number of cities are exploring RCV because it provides a number of benefits over current expensive and low-participation local elections, including:

- Making voting simpler for voters by eliminating the need for local nonpartisan primaries and consolidating two elections into one;
- Saving the cost of primaries altogether in cities with odd-year local elections;
- Demonstrably increasing voter participation;
- Ensuring majority winners in a single election. Voters rank their preferences on the ballot, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and so on. If no candidate receives a majority of first choices, then the least popular candidate is defeated and their ballots are reassigned to those voters' second choices; and this process is repeated until one candidate receives a majority of continuing ballots;
- Making voting easier for deployed military members and other citizens abroad by requiring one less election for them to receive and return their ballots on time; ●
- Improving the civility of campaigning; and
- Reducing the influence of outside money in campaigns.

WHEREAS, 85 to 95 percent of polled voters in the Twin Cities consistently say that RCV is simple to use;

WHEREAS, the Local Options measure is a significant opportunity to improve elections in cities, counties, townships, and school districts throughout the state.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE UNDERSIGNED, we support removing regulatory barriers and giving all local jurisdictions in Minnesota the option to use Ranked Choice Voting if they decide it is right for their communities.

Approved on consent agenda, February 27, 2020

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