



2021 SESSION REVIEW

Elections

Key changes

- Restored voting rights automatically for felons when they are not serving a sentence of total confinement under the Department of Corrections (DOC).
- Exempted from the Public Records Act (PRA) continuity of operations plans, security risk assessments, and election security records and portions of records that contain information related to security, operations, and infrastructure, but not information related to security breaches.
- Created a new punishment for misrepresentation of an unofficial ballot collection site or box.

Background

Although the validity of elections and election-related policies were in the spotlight nationally in 2020, there were not many bills related to elections considered by the legislature this session. Many of the challenges and controversies in other states were avoided here in Washington due to the state conducting mail-in elections since 2005.

Bills

- ✓ [House Bill 1078](#) (Simmons) – **Restoration of Felon Voting Rights.** Restores the right to vote automatically to people with felony convictions once the person is not serving a sentence of total confinement under DOC jurisdiction. The person must reregister to be placed on the voter rolls. *Passed House 57-41. Signed by Governor. Effective January 1, 2022.*
- ✓ [House Bill 1068](#) (Dolan) – **PRA Exemptions for Election Security Measures.** Makes certain exemptions from the PRA: continuity of operations plans for election operations, security risk assessments, other election security records, portions of records that contain information related to election security, operations, and infrastructure. These exemptions do not include information or records pertaining to security breaches (with exceptions). *Passed House 61-37. Signed by Governor. Effective April 14, 2021.*
- ✓ [Senate Bill 5015](#) (Hunt) – **Unofficial Ballot Drop Boxes.** Creates a new gross misdemeanor for misrepresentation of an unofficial ballot drop box or collection site as official. *Passed House 92-5-1. Signed by Governor. Effective July 25, 2021.*
- ✗ [House Bill 1156](#) (Harris-Talley) – **Ranked Choice Voting.** Would have permitted the use of Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) as a voting system in local elections with a grant program to local governments to implement RCV. Would have added an additional cost-recovery provision to the Washington Voting Rights Act (VRA) to allow a person to recoup research costs up to \$30,000 if a political subdivision adopts a remedy in response to the notice. *Died in House Rules Committee.*
- ✗ [House Bill 1453](#) (Bergquist) – **Voters' Pamphlets.** Would have added content-based restrictions to candidate statements and arguments for and against ballot measures, requiring that those appointed by the legislative authority to write arguments for and against ballot statements reside within the affected jurisdiction, requiring fiscal impact statements to appear in the pamphlet for legislation passed that significantly affects state revenues, requiring a pie chart showing operating budget expenditures for the most recent biennium, and increasing the maximum fine for publishing or distributing campaign material deceptively similar to voters' pamphlets. *Passed House 90-7-1. Died on Senate Second Reading Calendar.*