



Legislation Text

File #: 2005-0054, **Version:** 2

Clerk 04/04/2005

A MOTION directing the executive to undertake actions to improve the conduct of the elections process in King County and supporting election reforms in Washington state.

WHEREAS, voter confidence in the election process is paramount to maintaining the integrity of our democracy, and

WHEREAS, in the November 2004 general election, the election for governor was the closest in state history, and

WHEREAS, the closeness of the election brought state and county elections procedures under very close public scrutiny, and

WHEREAS, errors in the election process occurred in numerous counties throughout the state, including King County,

WHEREAS, on February 14, 2003, the metropolitan King County council adopted Ordinance 14570 to strengthen the management and oversight of elections by requiring council confirmation of the executive's appointments to the positions of director of the King County records, elections and licensing services division and the superintendent of elections, and

WHEREAS, in March 2003, the King County council hired an elections consultant to conduct an independent review of county elections, and

WHEREAS, on April 22, 2003, the council's elections consultant produced a final report for the county council thoroughly reviewing county elections procedures and making recommendations for improving the

election process in King County, and

WHEREAS, on July 14, 2003, the county council adopted Ordinance 14711 establishing a King County citizens' election oversight committee to examine procedural issues that had been identified in the 2002 and 2003 elections, to identify the causes of the problems, to review all elections procedures, and to recommend actions for improving the conduct of elections in King County, and

WHEREAS, in May 2004, following one year of diligent work, meeting twice or more each month, the oversight committee issued a one-hundred-fifty-eight-page report that identified and discussed twenty-one major issue areas and made one hundred nine findings and one hundred sixteen recommendations for improvements or areas of further study by the county, and

WHEREAS, on August 30, 2004, the council passed Motion 11987, which set a schedule to implement those recommendations of the citizens' election oversight committee that had not yet been implemented, recognizing that the majority of recommendations had already been implemented, and

WHEREAS, the council supports ongoing internal employee investigations within the records, elections and licensing services division and supports the director taking the necessary actions to improve the performance of the elections division, and

WHEREAS, the King County council intends to institute reforms that will further improve the elections process in King County and Washington state, and will help restore public confidence in elections;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The executive is hereby requested to undertake specific activities that have been previously recommended by the citizens' election oversight committee, the labor, operations and technology committee and proposed by the director of records, elections and licensing services. These activities consist of:

1. Evaluating the training needs of both permanent and temporary elections staff, developing an appropriate training curriculum and annually submitting and justifying a budget ordinance that will provide adequate resources for the ongoing training of employees;

2. Preparing a space plan for consolidation of elections operations into a single facility, estimating the costs of consolidation and proposing a schedule for consolidation. The plan should consider a range of options including making use of existing space, leasing space and constructing a new facility;

3. Evaluating all of the resource needs for elections and presenting them in a report to the council transmitted by August 1, 2005. The needs should be detailed and explained in such a way as to provide an understanding of the functional areas of elections as well as personnel and equipment needs;

4. Proposing for the council's consideration, several options to differentiate provisional ballots from regular ballots, including ways to prevent them from being inserted into optical scanning machines;

5. Identifying an appropriate countywide election that could be conducted completely by mail as a pilot demonstration. If the council approves an all-mail election, within sixty days following certification of the election, the executive shall submit a report to the council describing the costs, advantages and disadvantages of all mail elections. The report should include statistically valid survey information from voters on their views of the election;

B. The executive and the courts are requested to, by July 1, 2005, file with the clerk of the council, for distribution to all councilmembers, a report to the council on improved coordination between agencies required under state and or federal law to report on eligibility standards for voter registration in the areas of residency, citizenship and felony status with attention to improving the timeliness, accuracy and quality of information provided to ensure proper data matching and verification of voter status.

1. The report should also include information on the progress and impacts of implementation of the statewide voter registration database mandated under federal law by 2006.

2. The executive is requested to, by July 1, 2005, file with the clerk of the council, for distribution to all councilmembers, a report on improved reporting and procedures for the reconciliation of ballots issued, voters voting, and ballots cast, both for absentee and polling place ballots at the precinct level. The report should specifically indicate the manner in which the records, elections and licensing services division has

complied with state and federal laws and administrative rules governing the process for reconciliation prior to the certification of an election. Reconciliation reports prepared by the records, elections and licensing services division following each general election shall be submitted to the council and retained by the elections division for a period of twenty years.