CITY OF SEATTLE

ORDINANCE 126625

COUNCIL BILL 120369

AN ORDINANCE relating to ranked choice voting; requesting that a special election be held concurrent with the November 8, 2022 general election for submission to the qualified electors of the City of a proposition to institute ranked choice voting for primary elections for City of Seattle elected offices; adding a new Chapter 2.18 to the Seattle Municipal Code; proposing a ballot title; and ratifying and confirming certain prior acts.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF SEATTLE AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. A new Chapter 2.18 is added to the Seattle Municipal Code as follows:

Chapter 2.18 PRIMARY ELECTIONS

2.18.010 Findings

The City Council makes the following findings of fact and declarations:

A. A healthy and strong representative democracy depends on voting that allows the people to fully express their will.

B. The City is empowered to provide for its own election of officers consistent with general election laws, which includes the use of a primary election to winnow candidates to a final list of two for the general election based on the number of votes cast for each candidate.

C. Ranked choice voting allows voters to indicate their order of preference for the candidates running in each race and allows for the election of candidates with the greatest support from voters, better reflecting the voters’ will.

D. Ranked choice voting has been used successfully in elections in states and cities across the United States.

2.18.020 Ranked choice voting
Ranked choice voting shall be used in City of Seattle primary elections as soon as practicable for
King County Elections. The City Council requests that King County Elections implement the
provisions of this Chapter 2.18 no later than 2027 to select the top two candidates for elective
offices of the City of Seattle as those offices are designated in City Charter Article XIX.

A. Nominating primaries shall be conducted using the bottoms-up method of ranked
choice voting. Voters shall receive ballots that enable them to rank candidates in order of
preference. Each voter’s ballot shall count as a single vote for whichever candidate the voter has
ranked the highest. King County Elections shall count votes in rounds. In each round, the
candidate who received the fewest top rankings shall be eliminated. When a candidate is
eliminated, a vote cast for that candidate shall be transferred to that ballot’s next-highest ranked
remaining candidate and a new round of counting shall begin. Counting of top-ranked candidates
and elimination of the candidate with the fewest top rankings shall continue until two candidates
remain. The final two remaining candidates shall be certified as qualified to appear on the
general election ballot.

B. Only the two candidates nominated in the primary shall appear on the ballot of the
general election, which shall be conducted in accordance with general law governing the
election.

C. The King County Director of Elections may limit the number of candidates that voters
are able to rank, provided that voters are allowed to rank at least five candidates if at least five
candidates have filed.

D. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Section 2.18.020, if at the end of the
candidate filing period two or fewer candidates have filed for an office subject to this Chapter
2.18, the election for that office may be conducted according to general law.
E. For any election subject to this Chapter 2.18, King County Elections will ensure that
the ballot includes appropriate instructions to voters to effectuate the purposes of this Chapter
2.18, such as: "Rank candidates in the order of your choice."

Section 2. The City Council and Mayor find that this ordinance is on the same subject as
proposed in Initiative 134 – Seattle Approves. The City Council has rejected Initiative 134 and
proposes this ordinance as an alternative measure on the same subject pursuant to City Charter
Article IV, Section 1. The City Council directs that the City Clerk file this ordinance with the
Director of Elections of King County, Washington, as ex officio supervisor of elections,
requesting that the Director of Elections call and conduct a special election in the City in
conjunction with the state general election to be held on November 8, 2022, for the purpose of
submitting to the qualified electors of the City the proposition set forth in this ordinance pursuant
to City Charter Article IV, Section 1 and applicable law as an alternative measure different from
Initiative 134 but dealing with the same subject. The City Clerk is directed to certify to the King
County Director of Elections the ballot title approved by the City Attorney in accordance with
responsibilities under RCW 29A.36.071 and RCW 29A.72.050. The following ballot title
statement of subject and concise description are submitted to the City Attorney for consideration:

City of Seattle Proposition No. __ concerns allowing voters to rank candidates in primary
elections.

This measure would allow voters in primary elections for Mayor, City Attorney, and City
Councilmembers to rank candidates in the voter’s order of preference. Each voter’s top-
ranked vote would be counted first, and the candidate receiving the fewest votes would
be eliminated. If a voter’s first choice received the fewest votes, then that voter’s second
choice would be counted in the next round, and so on until two candidates remain to
proceed to the general election.

Section 3. Certification of such proposition by the City Clerk to the King County
Director of Elections in accordance with law prior to the date of such election on November 8,
2022, and any other act consistent with the authority and prior to the effective date of this
ordinance, are ratified and confirmed.

Section 4. The provisions of this ordinance are declared to be separate and severable.
The invalidity of any clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section, or portion of this
ordinance, or the invalidity of its application to any person or circumstance, does not affect
the validity of the remainder of this ordinance or the validity of its application to other persons
or circumstances.
Section 5. To the extent necessary to submit this ordinance to the vote of the people pursuant to Charter Article IV, subsection 1.D: this ordinance shall take effect and be in force 30 days after its approval by the Mayor, but if not approved and returned by the Mayor within ten days after presentation, it shall take effect as provided by Seattle Municipal Code Section 1.04.020. If approved by the people, this ordinance shall take full effect pursuant to Charter Article IV, subsections 1.F and 1.G.

Passed by the City Council the 14th day of July, 2022, and signed by me in open session in authentication of its passage this 14th day of July, 2022.

[Signature]
President of the City Council

☑ Approved / □ returned unsigned / □ vetoed this 19th day of July, 2022.

[Signature]
Bruce A. Harrell, Mayor

Filed by me this 19th day of July, 2022.

[Signature]
Elizabeth M. Adkisson, Interim City Clerk

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