

LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

[Charter Amendment – Consolidation of City Elections and Ranked-Choice Voting]

A proposal to the qualified voters of the City and County of San Francisco to amend the Charter of the City and County of San Francisco by amending Sections 2.101, 13.101, 13.102, 13.103.5, and Article XVII to (1) consolidate odd-year elections for City elective offices to a single year and (2) increase voter education and clarify implementation of ranked-choice voting.

Existing Law

The City holds its elections for Mayor, District Attorney, Sheriff, City Attorney, and Treasurer in odd-numbered calendar years. The last election for Mayor, Sheriff and District Attorney was held in November 2011, and the next election for these offices will be held in November 2015. The last election for City Attorney and Treasurer was held in November 2009, and the next election for these offices will be held in November 2013.

The City uses ranked-choice voting, also referred to as instant-runoff voting, to elect its Mayor, City Attorney, District Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriff, Assessor-Recorder, Treasurer, and members of the Board of Supervisors. In ranked-choice voting, voters may currently select up to the three candidates for a single office in order of preference.

The Charter specifies that ballots used for ranked-choice voting elections should allow voters to rank all candidates seeking election to office, unless the City's voting system cannot feasibly accommodate such a number of choices. But the Department of Elections may not limit the number of candidates appearing on a ranked-choice ballot to any fewer than three. In addition, the Charter requires the Department of Elections to conduct a voter education campaign to familiarize San Francisco voters with the City's ranked-choice voting system.

Amendments to Current Law

The proposed Charter amendment would consolidate the City's odd-year elections into a single calendar year. The City would continue to hold its elections for Mayor, District Attorney, Sheriff, City Attorney, and Treasurer every four years. But the City Attorney and Treasurer elected in 2013 would have two-year terms, and those offices would be on the ballot again in 2015. There would be no elections for City elective offices in 2017 and every fourth year thereafter.

The proposal would also specify that in implementing ranked-choice voting, the Director of Elections could not limit the number of choices appearing on a ranked-choice ballot to fewer than the maximum number allowed by the technical limitations of the City's voting system. With respect to voter education, the Director of Elections would be responsible for education about the City's elections generally, in addition to ranked-choice voting, and would be required

to target those education efforts at areas of the City with low voter turnout. The Department of Elections' voter education program would also be subject to annual review and approval by the Board of Supervisors.

The proposed Charter Amendment would also clarify existing law on term limits for members of the Board of Supervisors to reflect the Court of Appeals' recent decision interpreting this provision of the City's Charter.

Background Information

On March 5, 2002, the voters approved Proposition A, establishing a ranked-choice voting system to elect the City's Mayor, City Attorney, District Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriff, Assessor-Recorder, Treasurer, and members of the Board of Supervisors. The City first used ranked-choice voting to elect its local officials in November 2004.