

# STATE OF NEW YORK

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491

2021-2022 Regular Sessions

## IN SENATE

(Prefiled)

January 6, 2021

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Introduced by Sens. KRUEGER, HOYLMAN, MAY, SERRANO -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Elections

AN ACT to amend the election law, in relation to establishing a ranked choice voting method for certain local elections; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon expiration thereof

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. Legislative findings. The current system of voting often  
2 results in the election of a candidate that does not have the majority  
3 support of the electorate when there are three or more candidates  
4 running for an elective office. Further, where there are three or more  
5 candidates for an elective office, voters often will not vote for their  
6 preferred candidate to avoid "wasting" their vote on a "spoiler" candi-  
7 date. Rather, they will vote against a candidate they dislike, by voting  
8 for a leading candidate that they perceive as the lesser of two evils.  
9 The result of the current system in multi-candidate races can be the  
10 election of candidates that lack majority support.

11 The ranked choice voting method provides for the majority election for  
12 elective offices. Ranked choice voting gives voters the option to rank  
13 candidates according to the order of their choice. If no candidate  
14 obtains a majority of first-choice votes, then the candidate receiving  
15 the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated. Each vote cast for the  
16 eliminated candidate shall be transferred to the candidate who was the  
17 voter's next choice on the ballot. The process is continued until a  
18 candidate receives a majority of votes.

19 There are several potential benefits to the ranked choice voting meth-  
20 od. First, voters are free to mark their ballot for the candidate they  
21 truly prefer without fear that their choice will help elect their least  
22 preferred candidate. Second, it insures that the elected candidate has

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets  
[-] is old law to be omitted.

LBD04936-01-1

1 true majority support. In addition, the ranked choice voting method will  
2 (1) promote higher voter turnout, and (2) encourage positive campaign-  
3 ing, since candidates will seek second-choice and third-choice votes  
4 from voters and will therefore be less likely to attack other candidates  
5 and alienate voters that support other candidates as their first choice.  
6 In situations where runoffs are already required, it will eliminate the  
7 need for a second runoff election, with its increased costs and lower  
8 voter turnout.

9 The ranked choice voting method has been the subject of increasing  
10 interest across the nation. It has already been adopted by local refer-  
11 enda in California, Vermont, and Massachusetts. It is under consider-  
12 ation in many other states.

13 It is the purpose of this act to permit the use of the ranked choice  
14 voting method on a trial basis in certain local elections at the option  
15 of local governments in the years 2024 and 2025. This pilot program  
16 would permit the state legislature to evaluate the broader application  
17 of the ranked choice voting method to elections in New York state.

18 § 2. The election law is amended by adding a new article 18 to read as  
19 follows:

## 20 ARTICLE 18

### 21 RANKED CHOICE VOTING METHOD

#### 22 Section 18-100. Definitions.

23 18-102. Ranked choice voting method authorized in certain cases.

24 18-104. Ranked choice voting method; ballots.

25 18-106. Ranked choice voting method; procedures.

26 18-108. Voter education.

27 18-110. Construction.

28 § 18-100. Definitions. 1. "Ranked choice voting method" shall mean a  
29 method of casting and tabulating votes that simulates the ballot counts  
30 that would occur if all voters participated in a series of runoff  
31 elections, whereby the voters rank candidates according to the order of  
32 their choice and, if no candidate has received a majority of votes cast,  
33 then the candidate with the fewest first choice votes is eliminated and  
34 the remaining candidates advance to another counting round. In every  
35 round, each ballot is counted as one vote for the highest ranked advanc-  
36 ing candidate.

37 2. "Local government" shall mean a county, city, town, village, or  
38 school district.

39 § 18-102. Ranked choice voting method authorized in certain cases. 1.  
40 For elections to be held in the years two thousand twenty-four and two  
41 thousand twenty-five, local governments are hereby authorized to conduct  
42 elections utilizing the ranked choice voting method for the following  
43 elections: (a) member of the board of education in the case of a school  
44 district, (b) county executive and county legislator in the case of a  
45 county, (c) mayor, member of city council, public advocate, comptroller,  
46 and borough president, in the case of a city, (d) town supervisor and  
47 member of town council in the case of a town, and (e) mayor and village  
48 trustee in the case of a village. "Election" shall include the general  
49 election and primary, where applicable.

50 2. In order to implement the ranked choice voting method as provided  
51 in subdivision one of this section, the governing body of the local  
52 government shall adopt a resolution implementing the ranked choice meth-  
53 od as authorized by this article. Such resolution shall be subject to a  
54 permissive referendum.

1 3. Such resolution shall be adopted by the governing board of the  
2 local government at least one hundred eighty days before the election  
3 for which ranked choice voting will be utilized.

4 4. The provisions of sections 18-104, 18-106, 18-108 and 18-110 of  
5 this article shall apply only when three or more candidates have been  
6 nominated or designated for an office enumerated in subdivision one of  
7 this section, and the governing body of the local government has enacted  
8 a resolution implementing the ranked choice voting method.

9 § 18-104. Ranked choice voting method; ballots. 1. For offices subject  
10 to the ranked choice voting method, the ballot shall be simple and easy  
11 to understand and allow a voter to rank candidates for an office in  
12 order of choice. A voter may include no more than one write-in candidate  
13 among that voter's ranked choices for each office. If feasible, ballots  
14 shall be designed so that a voter may mark that voter's first choices in  
15 the same manner as that for offices not elected by the ranked choice  
16 voting method.

17 2. Instructions on the ballot shall conform substantially to the  
18 following specifications, although subject to modification, based on  
19 ballot design and voting machine:

20 "Vote for candidates by indicating your first-choice candidates in  
21 order of preference. Indicate your first choice by marking the number  
22 "1" beside a candidate's name, your second choice by marking the number  
23 "2" beside a candidate's name, your third choice by marking the number  
24 "3" beside a candidate's name and so on, for as many choices as you  
25 wish. You may choose to rank only one candidate, but ranking additional  
26 candidates will not hurt the chances of your first-choice candidate. Do  
27 not mark the same number beside more than one candidate. Do not skip  
28 numbers."

29 3. A sample ballot for an office subject to the ranked choice voting  
30 method shall illustrate the voting procedure for the ranked choice  
31 voting method. Such a sample ballot shall be included with each absentee  
32 ballot.

33 4. The appropriate election official for a local government where the  
34 ranked choice voting method has been authorized by said local government  
35 shall insure that the necessary voting system, vote tabulation system,  
36 or other similar or related equipment shall be available to accommodate  
37 the ranked choice voting method.

38 § 18-106. Ranked choice voting method; procedures. The following  
39 procedures shall apply in determining the winner in an election for an  
40 office subject to the ranked choice voting method:

41 1. The first choice marked on each ballot shall be counted initially  
42 by election officials. If one candidate receives a majority of the votes  
43 cast, excluding blank and void ballots, that candidate shall be declared  
44 elected.

45 2. If no candidate receives a majority of first-choice votes cast at  
46 the end of the initial count, the candidate receiving the fewest first-  
47 choice votes shall be eliminated. Each vote cast for the eliminated  
48 candidate shall be transferred to the candidate who was the voter's next  
49 choice on the ballot.

50 3. Candidates with the fewest votes shall continue to be eliminated,  
51 with the votes for such candidates transferred to the candidate who was  
52 each voter's next choice on the ballot until a candidate receives a  
53 majority of the votes cast, excluding blank and void ballots. When a  
54 candidate receives a majority of the votes cast, that candidate shall be  
55 declared elected.

1 4. If a ballot has no more available choices ranked on it, that ballot  
2 shall be declared exhausted. Where a ballot skips one or more numbers,  
3 that ballot shall be declared exhausted when the skipping of numbers is  
4 reached. A ballot with the same number for two or more candidates shall  
5 be declared exhausted when these double numbers are reached.

6 5. In the case of a tie between candidates for last place, and thus  
7 elimination, occurring at any stage in the tabulation, the tie shall be  
8 resolved so as to eliminate the candidate who received the least number  
9 of votes at the previous stage of tabulation. In the case of a tie to  
10 which a previous stage does not apply, or such previous stage was also a  
11 tie, the tie shall be resolved by drawing lots. However, if the tie  
12 occurs when there are only two candidates remaining, the tie shall be  
13 resolved in accordance with the provisions of this chapter.

14 § 18-108. Voter education. Where a local government shall pass a  
15 resolution authorizing the ranked choice voting method, the governing  
16 body shall conduct a voter education campaign on the ranked choice  
17 voting system to familiarize voters with the ballot design, method of  
18 voting, and advantages of determining a majority winner in a single  
19 election. The governing body shall use public service announcements, as  
20 well as seek other media cooperation to the maximum extent practicable.

21 § 18-110. Construction. All elections held by the ranked choice voting  
22 method pursuant to this article shall be subject to all the other  
23 provisions of this chapter and all other applicable laws relating to  
24 elections, so far as is applicable and not inconsistent with this chap-  
25 ter.

26 § 3. Severability. If any provision of this act or the application  
27 thereof shall for any reason be adjudged by any court of competent  
28 jurisdiction to be invalid, such judgment shall not affect, impair, or  
29 invalidate the remainder of this act, but shall be confined in its oper-  
30 ation to the provision thereof directly involved in the controversy in  
31 which such judgment shall have been rendered.

32 § 4. This act shall take effect immediately, and shall expire December  
33 31, 2026 when upon such date the provisions of this act shall be deemed  
34 repealed. Effective immediately the addition, amendment and/or repeal  
35 of any rule or regulation necessary for the implementation of this act  
36 on its effective date are authorized to be made and completed on or  
37 before such date.