



Washington State Legislature Refusing to Pay its Fair Share of Election Costs

No one should have to choose between safety and democracy; Douglas County taxpayers shouldn't have to prioritize one over the other. However, that's what happens every other year. And that's *exactly* what will happen again in 2020. While the 12th District Legislative Representatives are in support of the even year funding, the Washington State Legislature as a whole refuses to pass the necessary legislation.

Counties conduct elections on behalf of every level of government – from federal presidential elections all the way to local mosquito control districts. Washington State residents should be confident and proud that they have one of the most trustworthy and efficient election systems in the United States, with an excellent reputation for integrity, accuracy, and access.

Achieving this unparalleled election system comes with a high cost – the cost to modernize and maintain election registration and ballot-counting systems; the cost to provide the highest possible election security; and the cost to conduct elections for 4.4 million registered voters across the state. Funding all these necessary components of a world-class election system carries a high level of expense for County Auditors and taxpayers.

Same-day voter registration, more ballot drop boxes, and pre-paid postage are important additions to help improve voter access. However, they are costly additions that have been mandated by your state legislators. They are either not funded fully or not funded at all, creating more unfunded mandates to county government who are already tasked with the large responsibilities of providing public health services, law enforcement, courts, and a myriad of other statutorily and constitutionally required programs and services.

Who should pay? Nearly every ballot in every election contains a mixture of districts, such state, county, city, schools, etc. Every participating district pays its fair share of the total election cost based on the number of registered voters within its boundary lines. Every participant *except* for the State of Washington, that is. The State Legislature has decided to “dine and dash” during even years, when the vast majority of their state offices are on the ballot. Despite being given multiple opportunities to do the right thing and change the law, the state instead places the burden on county governments.

When counties are on the hook to pay the entire cost of conducting the state's elections, it means that valuable resources are diverted from law enforcement and our criminal justice system, public health, and parks. So long as the state fails to pay its fair share of state elections, counties will shoulder the burden of these unfunded mandates. County officials will continue to foot the state's bill while siphoning resources away from public safety and quality of life.

Or will they? Election administrators are readying for 2020, looming as the largest and most contentious election in Washington State's history. Will counties even be able to backfill the state's election costs? Is this a risk you want to take?

Now more than ever, we must support secure, transparent, and accessible elections. Hundreds of county officials – including all 39 independently-elected county auditors and elections directors – asked the State Legislature to pass a Fair Share Election Funding bill (House Bill 1291 and Senate Bill 5073). Instead of stepping up to their responsibility as every school, fire, and park district does, the state of Washington continues to refuse to pay its bills putting your vote at risk.

Let your voice be heard on this issue and tell your legislators to stop putting our electoral system at risk. As representatives of the Washington State Association of County Auditors and the Washington State Association of Counties, we urge you to call or e-mail your state legislators and tell them it's time to pay their fair share of their own elections. If you don't know how to reach the lawmakers who represent you, call the Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000 or visit www.leg.wa.gov

Signed in support on the 18th day of April, 2019.

County Auditor
Douglas County, Washington



Thad L. Duvall

Board of County Commissioners
Douglas County, Washington



Kyle Steinburg, Chair



Dan Sutton, Vice Chair



Marc S. Straub, Member