

# Washington Voting Rights Act

Our state must help close the representation gap in local elections

Every Washingtonian should have the opportunity to have their voice heard in local democracy. But in too many cities, school districts and local governments across Washington this right isn't being protected.

The Washington Voting Rights Act (WVRA) improves our local elections process and promotes justice by giving every voter a fair chance to elect leaders of their choice. At the same time, the WVRA empowers local governments to avoid costly litigation under the federal Voting Rights Act by creating a collaborative process to ensure every vote is protected and that every community is fairly represented.

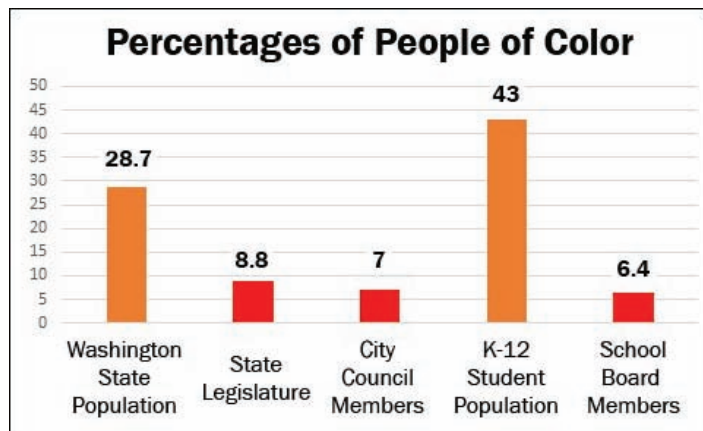
## The Problem

Washington has a representation problem. At every level of local government across the state, people of color are underrepresented in local elected positions at a staggering rate (see chart). The representation gap has real impact — communities across our state lack access to local decision-makers who know and understand their interests and concerns.

In addition, broken and discriminatory election systems that deny people of color an equal opportunity to influence elections undermine basic tenets of local representation by leaving the same communities without the ability to hold local elected officials accountable for representing their needs. The systemic problem that has created the representation gap and led to successful federal Voting Rights Act lawsuits in Yakima and Pasco requires a local systemic solution — the Washington Voting Rights Act.

## The Solution

Local democracy works best when everyone is engaged and has an opportunity to have their voice heard. The WVRA offers a fix to broken election systems and promotes stronger local elections by giving every voter a fair chance to elect leaders of their choice. At the same time it offers local jurisdictions a fair, consistent, and collaborative process for fixing discriminatory



local election systems that exclude entire communities from meaningful participation and a clear opportunity for jurisdictions to avoid litigation.

The WVRA provides local governments with an alternative to expensive litigation under the federal Voting Rights Act by requiring plaintiffs to provide notice before they file suit. The legislation gives local jurisdiction in question the opportunity to review the data and make changes to their election system within a 180-day window. If the jurisdiction agrees that a problem exists and chooses to fix their election system in a way that addresses the problem, they avoid litigation and payment of attorney's fees.

## Protect Every Vote

Washington state's demographics are changing, and we must ensure our election systems are designed to ensure fair representation for all of our communities.

Local representation is critical for communities to have a voice in important decisions that impact their lives, from neighborhood investments like street lights and sidewalks to decisions about how our education system meets the needs of all students. Pass the Washington Voting Rights Act to level the playing field and provide all voters in Washington with a fair chance at representation.



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