

SENATE No. 2911

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fourth General Court
(2025-2026)

SENATE, January 15, 2026.

The committee on Election Laws to whom was referred the petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 531) of Rebecca L. Rausch, Michael J. Barrett, Joanne M. Comerford, Erika Uytterhoeven and others for legislation to provide a local option for ranked choice voting in municipal elections, report the accompanying bill (Senate, No. 2911).

For the committee,
John F. Keenan

SENATE No. 2911

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fourth General Court
(2025-2026)

An Act providing a local option for ranked choice voting in municipal elections.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 44A of chapter 43 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2022
2 Official Edition, is hereby amended, in line 7, by inserting after the word “inclusive,” the
3 following words:- and section 103R of chapter 54.

4 SECTION 2. Section 77 of chapter 54 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2022
5 Official Edition, is hereby amended by striking out the phrase “marking a cross (X) in the square
6 at the right of the name of each candidate for whom he intends to vote” and inserting in place
7 thereof the following phrase:- marking the ballot in a manner prescribed by the state secretary.

8 SECTION 3. Said chapter 54, as so appearing, is hereby further amended by inserting
9 after section 103Q the following section:-

10 Section 103R. (a) For the purposes of this section, the following terms shall have the
11 following meanings, unless the context clearly requires otherwise:

“Batch elimination”, the simultaneous defeat of multiple candidates for whom it is mathematically impossible to be elected.

"Concluded ballot", a ballot that does not rank any continuing candidate or contains an overvote at the highest-ranked continuing candidate, or contains 2 or more sequential skipped rankings before its highest-ranked continuing candidate.

"Continuing candidate", a candidate who has been neither defeated nor elected.

“Elected candidate”, a candidate who has obtained sufficient votes to be elected, whether there are additional election rounds before the election has concluded, or the election concluded after the vote during which they were elected.

“Election threshold”, the number of votes sufficient for a candidate to be elected in a multi-seat election, which is calculated by dividing the total number of votes counting for continuing candidates in the first round by the sum of the number of seats to be elected and 1, disregarding any fractions, and then adding 1.

"Highest-ranked continuing candidate", the continuing candidate with the highest ranking on a voter's ballot.

"Last-place candidate", (i) the candidate with the lowest vote total in a round of the ranked-choice voting tabulation; or (ii) a candidate that is defeated in batch elimination.

"Overvote", a circumstance in which a voter ranks more than 1 candidate at the same ranking.

“Ranked choice voting”, a method of casting and tabulating ballots in which voters rank candidates for office in order of preference.

"Ranking", the number assigned on a ballot by a voter to a candidate to express the voter's relative preference for that candidate. Ranking number 1 shall be the highest ranking, ranking number 2 shall be the next-highest ranking, and so on.

"Skipped ranking", a circumstance in which a voter does not use a ranking and ranks a candidate with a subsequent ranking.

"Surplus fraction", the number equal to the difference between an elected candidate's vote total and the election threshold, divided by the candidate's vote total.

"Transfer value", the proportion of a vote that a ballot will count to its highest-ranked continuing candidate. Each ballot shall begin with a transfer value of 1. If a ballot counts to the election of a candidate under subsection (d)(1), the ballot receives a lower transfer value.

(b) Notwithstanding any other general or special law to the contrary, a city or town that accepts this section in the manner provided in subsection (m) may conduct a local election using ranked choice voting in which voters rank the candidates for an office in order of preference.

(c) Ranked choice voting shall apply to a single-seat office only when the number of candidates printed on the ballot exceeds 2 and to a multi-seat office only when the number of candidates printed on the ballot exceeds the number of seats to be elected.

(d) In any single-seat election, each round shall begin by counting the number of votes for each continuing candidate. Each ballot shall count as 1 vote for its highest-ranked continuing candidate. Concluded ballots shall not be counted for any continuing candidate. Each round shall proceed sequentially as follows:

(1) If there are 2 or fewer continuing candidates, the candidate with the most votes shall be elected, and tabulation shall be complete.

(2) If there are more than 2 continuing candidates, the last-place candidate shall be defeated, or the last-place candidates shall be defeated in batch elimination, and a new round shall begin.

(e) In any multi-seat election, each round shall begin by counting the number of votes for each continuing candidate. Each ballot shall count, at its current transfer value, for its highest-ranked continuing candidate. Concluded ballots shall not count for any continuing candidate. In the first round only, the election threshold shall then be calculated. Each round shall proceed sequentially as follows:

(1) If the sum of the number of elected candidates and continuing candidates is equal to the number of seats to be filled, then all continuing candidates shall be elected, and tabulation shall be complete.

(2) If at least 1 continuing candidate has greater than or equal to the number of votes than the election threshold, then all such candidates shall be elected. If the number of elected candidates is equal to the number of seats to be filled, then tabulation shall be complete. Otherwise, each ballot counting for an elected candidate shall be assigned a new transfer value by multiplying the current transfer value of the ballot by the surplus fraction for the candidate. Each elected candidate shall be deemed to have a number of votes equal to the election threshold in all future rounds, and a new round shall begin.

(3) Otherwise, the last-place candidate shall be defeated, or the last-place candidates shall be defeated in batch elimination, and a new round shall begin.

(f) Batch elimination shall apply to the largest possible group of continuing candidates such that the sum of the votes of candidates in the group is less than the individual number of votes of every continuing candidate not in the group, and provided that the number of continuing candidates not in the group is at least 1 more than the remaining number of positions to elect.

(g) Ties shall be resolved as follows:

(1) If two or more last-place candidates are tied and batch elimination applies, each tied candidate to whom batch elimination applies shall be defeated accordingly.

(2) If two or more continuing candidates are tied but are not in last place, the order of said tied continuing candidates shall be determined by the number of votes received by each tied candidate in the prior round.

(3) If two or more last-place continuing candidates are tied and batch elimination does not apply, the continuing candidate with the fewest votes in the prior round shall be defeated. If two or more continuing candidates were also tied in the prior round, the continuing candidate with the fewest votes in the next-prior round shall be eliminated. If two last-place continuing candidates are tied at the end of the first round and batch elimination does not apply, then the two tied continuing candidates shall have a run-off before the next round. The continuing candidate with fewer votes in the runoff will be defeated, and any remaining rounds in the election will proceed according to this section. This process shall be applied successively as many times as necessary, a tie shown in any prior round shall be decided by referring to the standing of the candidates in the round immediately preceding the tie.

(4) The results of any such tiebreaking events must be recorded and reused in the event of a recount.

(h) When a skipped ranking or repeat candidate ranking is encountered on a ballot, that vote shall count towards the highest continuing ranking. In the case of an overvote involving two or more continuing candidates, the overvote candidates and all subsequently ranked candidates will be disregarded. If any vote cannot be advanced because no further continuing candidates are ranked on that ballot, that ballot shall be declared concluded for that contest.

(i) As used in section 4 of chapter 43A, the "order of votes received" by candidates in a ranked choice voting election shall mean the order in which candidates are elected. If multiple candidates are elected in the same round, the respective order of elected candidates in that round shall mean the order of votes received by those candidates at the end of the round.

(j) In any election conducted using ranked choice voting the clerk of the city or town shall make best efforts to publish initial unofficial results on election night, as soon as they become available. Unofficial results shall be clearly marked as preliminary and subject to revision. In addition to any other information required by law to be reported with official final results, the clerk of the city or town shall make public the number and percentage of votes that each candidate received in each round of the official tabulation and any additional information that may be required by the charter, ordinances or bylaws of the city or town. The clerk of the city or town shall make final anonymized results and data available in both human-readable and machine-readable formats to allow for independent verification, consistent with applicable law.

(k) Preliminary elections for local offices shall not be held in a city or town that has accepted this section.

(l) This section may be accepted by:

118 (1) approval of a ballot measure submitted to the voters by the governing body of the city
119 or town at a regular or special election;

120 (2) ordinance or by-law; or

121 (3) charter amendment.

122 (m) Notwithstanding the provisions of applicable provisions of chapters 53 and 54 of the
123 general laws, ranked-choice voting ballots for use in municipal elections shall be prepared
124 according to a format set forth herein and otherwise consistent with state law.

125 (1) To the extent possible, a ranked choice voting ballot shall allow voters to rank as
126 many choices as there are candidates printed on the ballot. If the voting equipment is unable to
127 reasonably accommodate a number of rankings on the ballot equal to the number of candidates,
128 the Board of Registrars of Voters of the city or town may limit the number of choices a voter
129 may rank to the maximum number allowed by the voting equipment.

130 (2) A ranked choice voting ballot shall not interfere with a voter's ability to rank at least
131 1 write-in candidate.

132 (3) The ballot must indicate the number of seats to be filled for each contest.

133 (4) For each election where ranked choice voting is used and the number of candidates
134 exceeds two, the Board of Registrars of the city or town shall randomly draw lots prior to the
135 printing of ballots so as to determine the order in which the names of candidates shall appear on
136 the ballot. To the name of a candidate for a city or town office who is an elected incumbent
137 thereof shall be added the words 'Candidate for Reelection'.

138 (5) The ballot must comply with all otherwise applicable provisions of the General Laws
139 and the regulations promulgated thereunder.

140 (n) Not sooner than 4 years after acceptance of this section, a city or town that has
141 accepted this section may return to its prior voting method by:

142 (1) approval of a ballot measure submitted to the voters by the governing body of the
143 city or town at a regular or special election;

144 (2) ordinance or by-law; or

145 (3) charter amendment.

146 (o) The clerk of the city or town, subject to approval by the Board of Registrars, may
147 make any changes to the ranked choice voting ballot and tabulation process necessary to ensure
148 the integrity and smooth functioning of the election, provided that ranked choice voting shall still
149 be used and the fewest number of changes are made to achieve such purpose.

150 (p) A city or town that accepts this section shall conduct voter education and outreach to
151 familiarize voters with ranked choice voting. Educational materials shall be made publicly
152 available on the website of the city or town.

153 (q) The secretary of the commonwealth shall provide guidance, recommendations and a
154 model policy to assist cities and towns with developing educational materials and conducting
155 effective voter education and outreach regarding ranked choice voting. The secretary of the
156 commonwealth shall annually review and update the model policy to reflect best practices.

157 SECTION 4. If any part of this Act is declared unconstitutional by a court of competent
158 jurisdiction, the remaining parts shall survive in full force and effect. If a conflict arises between
159 this Act and any other provision of law, the policies and purposes of this Act shall govern.