

Judicial Elections

Elections Clearinghouse Notice

Issue #24-09

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All judicial elections are conducted as nonpartisan elections under the Top Two Primary laws; however, there are primary law exceptions that apply to several judicial offices. This clearinghouse replaces Clearinghouse #15-02, issued December 16, 2015, and reflects a legislative change passed in [Substitute Senate Bill 5182 \(2023\)](#).

Candidate Qualifications

[RCW 29A.24.070\(1\)\(a\)](#) was amended in 2023 to change the filing location of single-county courts of appeal and superior court districts to the Office of the Secretary of State.

Judicial candidates must be registered voters in the jurisdiction of the office when filing a declaration of candidacy. ([RCW 29A.24.075\(3\)](#))

Exceptions

- A candidate for Superior Court Judge needs to be a registered voter within Washington State. The candidate is not required to be a resident of the county of that court. ([WA Const. Art. IV § 5](#))
- A candidate for Municipal Court Judge must be a registered voter within the county. The candidate is not required to be a resident in the city of that court. ([RCW 3.50.057](#))

Appearance on the Ballot

Most judicial elections are scheduled for even-numbered years and treated the same as other nonpartisan offices. ([RCW 29A.52.220](#))

Exceptions

- An uncontested Superior Court race in a county with a population of 100,000 or more is not printed on the ballot; instead, the candidate is issued a certificate of election following the last day for candidates to withdraw.
 - This applies only when the office has a single candidate and each county within the jurisdiction exceeds the 100,000 population threshold. ([WA Const. Art. IV § 29](#))
- Elections to fill vacancies for judicial offices other than district and municipal courts may occur in odd- or even-numbered years. (WA Const. Art. IV §§ [3](#) and [5](#); RCWs [2.04.100](#), [2.08.060](#), [2.08.069](#), [2.08.120](#))
- Elections to fill vacancies for district court positions occur in even-numbered years only. ([AGLO 1973 No. 76](#); [RCW 29A.04.321\(1\)](#))

- An elected municipal court office is on the ballot in odd-numbered years only. A vacancy is filled by appointment for the remainder of the term. (RCWs [3.50.050](#), [3.50.093](#))

Judicial Certificates of Election

Though single-county judicial district candidates file for office with the Office of the Secretary of State, the county auditor produces certificates of election for single-county positions. ([RCW 29A.52.360](#))

The Office of the Secretary of State produces certificates of election for multi-county judicial district candidates. ([RCW 29A.52.370](#))

The chart below explains the framework for judicial certificates of election.

Location	Accepts Candidate Filing	Issue Certificate of Election
Governor	N/A	Court of Appeals and Supreme Court ¹
OSOS	Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, and Superior Court ²	Multi-county Superior court districts ³
County Auditor	District Court and Municipal Court	Single county Superior Court, District Court, and Municipal Court within the county ⁴

¹ [RCW 29A.52.370](#)

² [RCW 29A.24.070\(1\)\(a\)](#)

³ [RCW 29A.52.370](#)

⁴ [RCW 29A.52.360](#)

Judicial Elections Chart

The chart below explains the framework for judicial elections.

Candidates	Municipal Court District Court Court of Appeals Supreme Court		Superior Court	
	Primary	General	Primary	General
1	No ¹	Yes ²	County population less than 100,000: No ¹ County population 100,000 or more: No; certificate of election is issued after candidate filing. ³	County population less than 100,000: Yes ² County population 100,000 or more: No; certificate of election is issued after candidate filing. ³
2	No ¹	Yes ²	No ¹	Yes ²
3 or more	Yes	Yes ²	Yes	Yes ²

1 [RCW 29A.52.220\(1\)](#)

2 [RCW 29A.36.170\(1-2\)](#)

3 [WA Const. Art. IV § 29](#) *Note: When applied to multi-county jurisdictions, all counties in the jurisdiction must meet the population threshold.*