

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1143

As Reported by House Committee On:
Local Government

Title: An act relating to making the office of the county auditor a nonpartisan office.

Brief Description: Making the office of the county auditor a nonpartisan office.

Sponsors: Representative Appleton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 1/18/11, 1/21/11 [DP].

<p>Brief Summary of Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Makes the office of the county auditor a nonpartisan office.
--

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Takko, Chair; Tharinger, Vice Chair; Angel, Ranking Minority Member; Asay, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fitzgibbon, Smith, Springer and Upthegrove.

Staff: Miranda Leskinen (786-7291) and Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

County auditors are elected officials who fulfill an array of duties, some of which are required by statute and include:

- recording deeds and real estate transactions;
- tracking title changes and collecting licensing fees, as well as certain fees and taxes on behalf of the state Department of Revenue;
- auditing county finances and other administrative duties;
- serving as the board of county commissioners clerk (if the board does not reassign the role); and
- supervising and administering elections which spans from voter registration to maintaining and reporting county election results.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Excepting judicial offices and offices in home rule charter counties that provide otherwise, all county offices, including the office of the county auditor, are partisan offices. A partisan office is defined as one in which candidates may indicate a political party preference and have that preference listed next to his or her name on primary and general election ballots. In contrast, candidates for nonpartisan offices do not indicate a political party preference.

Current law requires that a certain order be followed in the placement of elected offices and ballot issues on primary and election ballots.

Summary of Bill:

The office of the county auditor is designated as a nonpartisan county office. Ballot position requirements are modified to reflect this designation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Trust in the elections process is important, and designating the office of the county auditor as a partisan office (subject to exception in home rule charter counties) may create a barrier to building this trust. Making the office of the county auditor a nonpartisan office would help to facilitate a smooth and transparent elections process.

Experience has shown that the public wants the county auditor's office to be designated as nonpartisan. County auditors have expressed the same desire, as designating the office of the county auditor as a nonpartisan office would allow county auditors to maintain a business relationship with both parties by not having to choose a political party designation. In other words, county auditors could establish positive and transparent working relationships without having partisanship impact that process.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Carolyn Weikel and Julie Anderson, Washington State Association of County Auditors; Marianne Nichols, Pend Oreille County Auditor's Office; Jeanne Youngquist, Skagit County Auditor's Office; and Milene Henley, San Juan County Auditor's Office.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.