
SENATE BILL 5752

State of Washington

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By Senators Prentice, Moyer, Sutherland, McDonald, Pelz, A. Smith, Haugen, Skratek, Nelson, McAuliffe, M. Rasmussen, Winsley and Snyder

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1 AN ACT Relating to citizen participation in the discussion of
2 public issues; adding new sections to chapter 43.63A RCW; and providing
3 an expiration date.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature recognizes that:

6 (a) Government is of the people, by the people, and for the people.
7 All citizens who are interested should be enabled to participate and
8 exercise their rights of freedom of speech, assembly, petition, and the
9 right to be heard in order to celebrate, evaluate, and enhance the
10 social, educational, and economic climates of our state in the future,
11 and enhance the credibility of our political processes.

12 (b) In a democracy a primary role of citizens is to contribute
13 their opinions, respond to the opinions of other citizens, and respond
14 to the queries of their leaders on issues that are of interest and
15 concern to all. Yet communication between the people and their leaders
16 has remained difficult and elusive. Present social processes with
17 primary reliance upon people attending big meetings at often remote
18 distances are usually beyond the time and energy levels of most
19 citizens. There is growing recognition that this is a severe burden to

1 the democratic process. Communication at such big meetings is often
2 frustrating to both leaders and people because time allows only a few
3 people to talk while most can only listen. Efforts to pass resolutions
4 and amendments or move toward consensus in such traditional legislative
5 contexts is often an emotionally draining experience for all. The
6 result is that many people drop out of such inadequate meetings and do
7 not participate sufficiently in their public and organizational
8 planning processes. Lack of adequate participation by citizens
9 devitalizes our public and private organizations and institutions and
10 is frequently and erroneously diagnosed as "apathy" among the people.

11 (c) Our state has been identified as one of five precursor states
12 in social innovation (Megatrends, John Naisbitt, 1982, Warner Books,
13 New York). For example, we were the only state that emerged from the
14 bicentennial celebration in 1976 with a recommendation and funding by
15 its commission for an ongoing program to better enable citizen
16 volunteers to participate in the public planning processes of
17 government « a subtle but significant difference from the volunteerism
18 for physical service enacted by several other state commissions.

19 (d) The need now is to create a workable, essentially self-funded,
20 network of citizens for the benefit of governments through use of new
21 means of "many-to-many" mass communication in our state as a whole:
22 (i) To enhance public information through citizenship education, and
23 (ii) to serve as a bridge for feedback communication between people and
24 leaders. Present methods of citizen-government communication including
25 public hearings and traditional "one-to-many" communication such as
26 television, radio, and newspapers obtain public information from
27 governments through traditional news releases that are often piecemeal
28 and insufficient to arrive at the public consensus needed for more
29 effective governance. Further, societal processes that permit citizens
30 to participate responsibly and meaningfully within their time and
31 energy levels in the viable discussion of public issues with results
32 returned routinely to leaders are nearly nonexistent.

33 (2) The legislature further recognizes that governments derive
34 their just powers from the consent of the governed, and the pursuit of
35 happiness is a right of the people and a purpose of governments.
36 Governments are not charged with providing their citizens with all the
37 amenities of life they feel are required for their happiness, but
38 governments are charged with enabling their citizens to pursue their
39 own happiness. Increased opportunities by citizens to meet and receive

1 information, reflect and discuss information, and respond as a sounding
2 board with their advisory opinions to their leaders, both public and
3 private, is an important exercise of their constitutional rights and
4 right to be heard. In turn, exercise of these rights is an important
5 factor in the transfer of authority from people to their leaders and in
6 fostering domestic and economic tranquility in a search for solutions
7 to increasingly complex societal and economic problems. The
8 credibility of government and political relationships is enhanced.

9 (3) It is the intent of the legislature to facilitate public and
10 private planning and decision-making processes and to strengthen the
11 functioning of democracy in the state of Washington by widening
12 channels of communication and fostering more positive relationships
13 between citizens and public and private institutions. The legislature
14 proposes a structure whereby any small group of eight to twelve
15 citizens meeting at times and places convenient to themselves may
16 receive public information and queries on issues and communicate back
17 to officials, themselves, and the public-at-large their advisory
18 opinions on those issues. It is the intent of the legislature to
19 create a climate in which citizens can act responsibly within their
20 abilities of time and energy to influence decisions affecting their
21 lives and future in Washington state. In short, it is necessary to
22 supplement traditional government processes to facilitate the ability
23 of citizens to participate meaningfully and conveniently in the
24 planning processes of government that affect their lives.

25 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The office of citizen councilor is created
26 in accordance with section 13 of this act. Any citizen registered to
27 vote may become a citizen councilor on request by sending a letter to
28 the department of community development or calling a special toll-free
29 number. Citizen councilors shall act collectively as official advisors
30 and a sounding board for public officials and agencies, legislative
31 study committees, and the department of community development on issues
32 of public interest or concern. Conveners of citizen councilor groups
33 shall be those designated by the citizen councilor coordinator from
34 among citizen councilors who volunteer to host a group. Every effort
35 shall be made to assign citizen councilors to a group that meets at a
36 convenient time and place. Meetings will usually be in residence or
37 work area zip codes. Citizen councilors may participate:

1 (1) In a citizen councilor organizational group under section 8 of
2 this act;

3 (2) In a citizen councilor group usually organized by residence or
4 work area zip code with the assistance of the citizen councilor
5 coordinator; or

6 (3) As an individual if the individual is unable to attend meetings
7 in groups due to age, disability, or remote location.

8 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The department of community development:

9 (1) Shall determine suggested issues for public discussion from
10 suggestions received from public officials, agencies, legislators, and
11 individual citizen councilors and recommend an appropriate issue or
12 issues for consideration by citizen councilors to a steering committee.
13 The steering committee shall be composed of four voting members: One
14 member of the minority and one member of the majority party from each
15 house of the legislature. Other nonvoting members of the steering
16 committee shall be: (a) A representative from the governor's office,
17 (b) a representative from the superintendent of public instruction, (c)
18 a representative from any organization participating with over fifty
19 groups of eight to twelve persons under section 5(7) of this act, and
20 (d) the citizen councilor coordinator selected as provided in section
21 4 of this act;

22 (2) After approval by the legislative members of the steering
23 committee, shall assign the issue or issues approved for discussion to
24 the volunteer citizen councilor coordinator for preparation and
25 implementation by value reporters and others. Value reporters assigned
26 to gather information on issues shall be careful to present all issues
27 as evenhandedly as possible, taking care to present the generally
28 prevailing viewpoints surrounding an issue or issues from experts,
29 officials, and others in an effort to provide the public with
30 information needed for discussion. Value reporters shall conduct
31 interviews of experts, officials, and others to solicit their various
32 viewpoints and record such interviews on audio or video tape for later
33 reproduction and distribution to citizen councilor groups. Before any
34 materials are released to citizen councilor groups, however, persons
35 interviewed and taped shall approve their taped interview for release
36 or complete another interview to their satisfaction, otherwise their
37 statement shall not be included in materials sent to citizens;

1 (3) Shall approve the public information materials prepared by the
2 citizen councilor coordinator and authorize its distribution to citizen
3 councilors.

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** The office of citizen councilor coordinator
5 is created within the department of community development. The
6 director of community development shall appoint the citizen councilor
7 coordinator with the advice and consent of the board of directors of
8 the Washington state center for volunteerism and citizen service. The
9 citizen councilor coordinator shall serve at the pleasure of the
10 director of community development, until terminated with the approval
11 of the board of directors of the Washington state center for
12 volunteerism and citizen service, and shall be a volunteer and serve
13 without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for actual expenses
14 incurred in carrying out his or her duties under sections 1 through 13
15 of this act as funds are available.

16 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** The citizen councilor coordinator shall:

17 (1) Promote to the citizens of the state the citizen councilor
18 program and its contribution to public and private planning processes;

19 (2) Oversee preparation, tabulation, summarization, and
20 dissemination of data and information by the volunteer staff;

21 (3) Receive, on behalf of the citizen councilor revolving fund,
22 gifts and donations of real or personal property, including cash and
23 in-kind services;

24 (4) Hire a value reporter and other paid staff to assist the
25 volunteer staff if funds are available;

26 (5) Contract for any services including without limitation toll-
27 free telephone number and answering services, keypunch, computer,
28 scanning, recording, reporting, consulting, printing, and mailing to
29 carry out this chapter as long as the providers of these services
30 either work without financial compensation or are unrelated to the
31 citizen councilor coordinator;

32 (6) Solicit volunteers to assist in administering the program from
33 community service, educational, civic, business, religious, and other
34 organizations;

35 (7) Solicit citizen councilor groups from existing organizations;

1 (8) Solicit individual citizen councilors to participate in local
2 groups organized by mutual convenience usually within the same
3 residence or work zip code area;

4 (9) Assign value reporters to interview scholars, experts, public
5 officials, planners, leaders, and others on tape concerning topics of
6 discussion assigned by the department of community development;

7 (10) Produce audio or video cassette tapes, or both, and printed
8 materials evenhandedly;

9 (11) Mail public information materials to citizen councilor
10 conveners or individual citizen councilors, or both;

11 (12) Provide, at cost, group mailing labels of its own conveners on
12 request of an organization participating or to a county, municipality,
13 or school district if a private iteration of their own constituents is
14 desired at their own time and expense;

15 (13) Scan or tabulate, or both, citizen councilor response sheets
16 using, as appropriate, the "Fast Forum" computer program that is
17 available without cost to the citizen councilor program and the
18 University of Washington academic computing services as a nonprofit,
19 external user;

20 (14) Mail organizational, community, school, business, or church
21 profiles to the leaders of such participating organizations for their
22 information and without cost when they have over fifty groups
23 responding state-wide;

24 (15) Prepare summary reports of data generated and press releases;

25 (16) Mail summary reports and other information to all citizen
26 councilors, conveners, participating organizations, and to those public
27 officials who have indicated to the citizen councilor coordinator that
28 they are interested; and

29 (17) Maintain data generated for public and media reference in the
30 department of community development.

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** State officials, agencies, and the
32 legislature and their staffs shall actively cooperate and participate
33 with the department of community development and the citizen councilor
34 coordinator staff in the posing of issues and preparation of materials
35 for citizen councilor consideration.

36 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** The citizen councilor coordinator shall
37 actively encourage citizen councilor groups to form throughout the

1 state. Citizen councilor groups shall usually consist of a minimum of
2 eight and a maximum of twelve regularly assigned members and meet on
3 call of their convener at times and places they deem most appropriate
4 during a thirty-day or other designated time period. Citizen councilor
5 groups shall normally meet three or four times per year on state
6 issues. They shall have the opportunity to listen to audio or video
7 tapes articulating an issue of public interest or concern and study
8 other materials prepared or authorized as described in section 3 of
9 this act. Citizen councilors shall have the opportunity to respond
10 anonymously making their opinions known on individual mark-sense
11 response sheets for return to the citizen councilor coordinator for
12 keypunching or optical scanning, tabulation, and analysis.

13 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 8.** Eight through twelve citizens from
14 organizations such as, but not limited to, community, civic,
15 associations, cooperatives, unions, church, business, or school
16 district groups may enroll as an organizational group with their own
17 convener designated. An organizational profile report shall be
18 provided the leaders of organizations with fifty or more groups without
19 cost to inform them of how their members responded to public issues
20 posed or approved by the department of community development and shall
21 be open to public inspection in the offices of the department of
22 community development. If additional profiles or services are
23 requested by an organization of its own constituents, the policy,
24 rules, and fees to cover such costs shall be as determined by the
25 citizen councilor coordinator. Organizations with fifty or more groups
26 may purchase mailing labels of their group conveners at cost and
27 prepare and mail their own group materials for tabulation at their own
28 effort and expense. This data shall not be tabulated by the citizen
29 councilor coordinator and shall not be combined with the public data
30 nor available for public inspection at the department of community
31 development.

32 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 9.** Governmental units such as counties,
33 municipalities, and others may purchase mailing labels of conveners,
34 including organizational conveners, if they wish to use the network of
35 citizen councilors in their general geographical areas. Counties can
36 obtain mailing labels of conveners within their county; municipalities
37 and others can obtain mailing labels of conveners within specific zip

1 codes. They then can request participation from such groups using
2 their own materials for tabulation at their own effort and expense.
3 The citizen councilor coordinator may authorize use of the volunteer
4 staff to advise or assist in such projects if volunteers are available.

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 10.** Because of the strong citizenship education
6 component under sections 1 through 13 of this act, school districts are
7 encouraged to organize organizational groups of parents under section
8 8 of this act and obtain a packet of material prepared by the citizen
9 councilor coordinator for high school social studies teachers.
10 Students can listen to the tape, study and discuss the material, and
11 hand-tabulate the percentage responses of their own class to the
12 objective questions posed. When the congressional profile reports are
13 returned, students can compare similarities and differences
14 individually and as a class with those responses of their parents and
15 citizens state-wide to widen the discussion. Tolerance of diversity of
16 opinion and a respect for the opinions of others, which is essential in
17 a democracy, is fostered through constructive class discussions in
18 psychosocial education and critical thinking. Citizenship education is
19 itself vital to the full functioning of the democratic institutions in
20 which we all participate. The goal is to make all students aware of
21 the responsibilities of citizenship and to communicate that: "You are
22 an important part of society. You, your opinions, and the reasons
23 behind them will shape the future." If the citizen councilor
24 coordinator determines that sufficient funds are available, student
25 opinions may be tabulated state-wide for student comparison with the
26 opinions of citizen councilors.

27 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 11.** Each citizen councilor shall be asked to
28 make donations from time to time to help cover the costs of the citizen
29 councilor program. It is also the intention of the legislature that
30 donations and gifts be solicited from public-spirited individuals,
31 businesses, and foundations for the purpose of funding the program.
32 However, since all costs of this program are provided by donations with
33 no funds from public sources, the citizen councilor coordinator shall
34 use his or her discretion in determining the scale and the scope of the
35 program so that expenses do not exceed available funds.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 12.** A citizen councilor revolving fund is
2 created and shall consist of donations collected under this chapter and
3 any moneys appropriated to it by law for specific purposes. The state
4 treasurer shall be custodian of the revolving fund. Disbursements from
5 the revolving fund shall be on authorization of the citizen councilor
6 coordinator. In order to maintain an effective expenditure and revenue
7 control, the citizen councilor revolving fund shall be subject in all
8 respects to chapter 43.88 RCW, but no appropriation is required to
9 permit expenditures and payment of obligations from the fund.

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 13.** (1) The department of community development
11 may provide the citizen councilor coordinator and his or her volunteer
12 staff with space in existing offices and with clerical services from
13 existing staff to assist in establishing and conducting the citizen
14 councilor program. Appropriations are not required, but the director
15 of community development may consider the services provided under this
16 section in submitting the department's budget.

17 (2) The citizen councilor coordinator shall seek to obtain
18 donations from citizen councilor organizational groups, citizen
19 councilors, and public-spirited individuals, community service
20 organizations, businesses, and foundations to cover the costs of the
21 program. When ten thousand dollars in donations have been received,
22 the department of community development shall authorize the citizen
23 councilor coordinator to establish a toll-free telephone number and
24 answering service and to develop a list of the names, addresses, and
25 telephone numbers of persons and groups interested in serving as
26 citizen councilors, citizen councilor conveners, or citizen councilor
27 organizational groups, or in making donations. When forty thousand
28 dollars in donations have been received, the citizen councilor
29 coordinator may initiate the new communication process contemplated in
30 sections 1 through 13 of this act and continue it at a scope and scale
31 that is supportable by the resources available.

32 (3) In the event the program under this chapter fails to support
33 itself and is terminated by the department of community development or
34 expires, funds remaining after payment of all outstanding expenses and
35 disposal of equipment and supplies owned shall be deposited in the
36 general fund.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 14.** Sections 1 through 13 of this act shall
2 expire June 30, 1997.

3 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 15.** Sections 1 through 13 of this act are each
4 added to chapter 43.63A RCW.

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