

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2575

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**As Reported By House Committee On:**  
Energy & Utilities

**Title:** An act relating to improving access to state government.

**Brief Description:** Allowing phone companies and other information providers to include listings for elective officials in their directories free of charge.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Crouse and D. Sommers; by request of Governor Lowry.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Energy & Utilities: 1/24/96, 1/30/96 [DP].

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Casada, Chairman; Crouse, Vice Chairman; Hankins, Vice Chairman; Patterson, Ranking Minority Member; and Kessler.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Chandler; Mastin and Mitchell.

**Staff:** Margaret Allen (786-7110).

**Background:** A local telephone company is required to provide a comprehensive listing of numbers in its local calling area.

There are 22 local telephone companies operating in Washington; in addition, there are numerous directory publishing companies. Charges levied by a local telephone company for a directory listing are regulated by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, whereas charges levied by a directory publishing company are unregulated.

Under current state law, telephone companies must charge their published rates and, with some exceptions, are prohibited from charging different rates to different customers. It is unclear whether this law would permit a local telephone company to publish the office telephone number of an elected official free of charge.

**Summary of Bill:** The Legislature finds that (1) citizens need access to their elected officials; (2) rates charged by telecommunications companies for directory assistance create a barrier for citizens living outside cities in which the offices of elected officials are located; (3) the need to use directory assistance has a disparate impact on access to elected officials; and (4) efforts to equalize access to elected officials is in the public interest and consistent with efforts to implement universal service in telecommunications services.

Telecommunications companies and information service providers are explicitly authorized to include directory listings for offices of elected officials at no charge.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Testimony For:** This bill addresses equity and access issues and would improve public access to elected officials. Telephone companies may not charge different customers different rates on a discriminatory basis. The bill authorizes, but does not require, telephone companies and directory publishing companies to publish the telephone numbers of the offices of elected officials free of charge. Any increased costs to the companies are likely to be offset by an increased volume in calls. The bill's permissive nature is in the spirit of regulatory reform.

**Testimony Against:** Although the intent of the bill is appreciated, some telephone companies already publish the telephone numbers of the offices of elected officials free of charge, often among the "community services" listings. Legislation is not needed to permit companies to do what they are already free to do.

**Testified:** Representative Crouse, prime sponsor; and Kathy Kelly, Office of the Governor. (Con) Rosemary Williamson, GTE Northwest.