

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6642

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations, February 1, 1996

Title: An act relating to voting for port commissioners.

Brief Description: Limiting voters of a port commissioner district to elect commissioners in districts with populations of five hundred thousand or more.

Sponsors: Senators Heavey and Schow.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations: 1/31/96, 2/1/96 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6642 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Goings, Hale, Heavey, McCaslin and Winsley.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Background: Port districts are local governments authorized by statute to administer the harbors, rail and air transfer and terminal facilities and industrial improvements of the county. They are created by the county either by petition of the voters or by action of the county legislative authority.

The powers of the port district are exercised through an elected port commission of either three or five members. The elections are nonpartisan. The terms of the commissioners are for four years, with exceptions up to six years. The terms are staggered.

Counties of 500,000 or more population with countywide port district boundaries do not have commissioner districts. All other port districts have either three or five commissioner districts. A countywide port district with three commissioner positions in a county with less than 500,000 population that has three county legislative districts must use those legislative districts as its commissioner districts.

It is in these commissioner districts that each commissioner candidate must live and vote. It is only residents of the commissioner district who can vote in the primary elections for the candidates to represent that particular commissioner district on the ballot for port commissioner in the general election.

In the general election, all voters of the port district may vote for their favorite candidate for all commissioner positions up for election that year.

Summary of Substitute Bill: When the population of the port district is 1 million or more, the port district must be divided into commissioner districts.

The county population threshold of 500,000 is removed so that all countywide port districts with three commissioner positions and three commissioner districts in counties with three legislative districts must use the county legislative authority districts as the port commissioner districts.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: By increasing the population threshold for port districts required to use commissioner districts for their primaries to 1 million, only the Port of Seattle is affected by the bill.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: The large port districts which select their candidates for commissioners by an at-large primary wind up with poor representation of the whole district and poor accountability of the commissioners to the voters.

Testimony Against: The Port of Seattle needs commissioners with a wholistic outlook who are provided by at-large primaries.

Testified: Tom Parker, Airport Communities Coalition (pro); Jim Boldt, Linda Hul, Ports of Tacoma/Seattle.