
HOUSE BILL 1554

State of Washington

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By Representatives Reams, Jacobsen, L. Thomas, Dellwo, Robertson, Valle, Van Luven, Kremen, Chopp, Scott, Cole, Thibaudeau, Wolfe, Ebersole, Poulsen and Costa

Read first time 01/30/95. Referred to Committee on Government Operations.

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 should be enabled to participate and exercise their rights
8 of freedom of speech, assembly, petition, and the right to be heard in
9 order to celebrate, evaluate, and enhance the social, political,
10 educational, and economic climates of our state in the future.

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

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

11 (c) Futures research is a process that includes the study of ways
12 to improve the sociological and technological future; it is not just
13 forecasting. Research in pure and applied social science that has been
14 conducted in this state over the past two decades has recently received
15 state and national recognition in the development of new administrative
16 and communication technology. (Washington State Senate Resolution No.
17 1993-8636.) Our state has been identified as one of five precursor
18 states in social innovation (Megatrends, John Naisbitt, 1982, Warner
19 Books, New York). For example, we were the only state that emerged
20 from the bicentennial celebration in 1976 with a recommendation and
21 funding by its commission for an ongoing program to better enable
22 citizen volunteers to participate in the public planning processes of
23 government - a subtle but significant difference from the volunteerism
24 for physical service enacted by several other state commissions.

25 (d) It is necessary to use futures research in the move toward an
26 information society, decentralization, long-term solutions, high-tech
27 and high-touch, and networking ("Megatrends"). The representative
28 democracy of today will contain a stronger component of participation
29 by citizens tomorrow. These are cultural trends and cannot be stopped,
30 only guided. The need now is to create a workable, essentially self-
31 funded, network of citizens for the benefit of state and local
32 governments through use of new means of "many-to-many" mass
33 communication in our state as a whole: (i) To enhance public
34 information through citizenship education, and (ii) to serve as a
35 bridge for feedback communication between people and leaders of
36 government, schools, business, and community in cooperation with
37 traditional media. Present methods of citizen-government-community
38 communication including public hearings and traditional "one-to-many"
39 communication such as television, radio, and newspapers obtain public

1 information from governments and media through traditional news
2 releases and editorials that are often piecemeal and insufficient to
3 arrive at the public consensus needed for good governance and to enable
4 citizens to be responsible. Further, societal processes that permit
5 citizens to participate responsibly, routinely, and meaningfully within
6 their time and energy levels in the viable discussion of issues with
7 results returned to leaders are nearly nonexistent. This has resulted
8 in public alienation. If the legislature is successful in the
9 pioneering effort of chapter . . ., Laws of 1995 (this act), it will be
10 a major societal accomplishment in community building and a worthy gift
11 of our state and its citizens to our nation and the noblest of all
12 experiments in governance--democracy.

13 (2) The legislature further recognizes that governments derive
14 their just powers from the consent of the governed, and the pursuit of
15 happiness is a right of the people and a purpose of governments.
16 Governments are not charged with providing their citizens with all the
17 amenities of life they feel are required for their happiness, but
18 governments are charged with enabling their citizens to pursue their
19 own happiness. Increased opportunities by citizens to meet and receive
20 information, reflect and discuss information, and respond as a sounding
21 board with their advisory opinions to their leaders, both public and
22 private, is an important exercise of their constitutional rights and
23 right to be heard. In turn, exercise of these rights is an important
24 factor in the continual process of the transferring authority from the
25 people to their leaders and in fostering domestic and economic
26 tranquility in a search for solutions to increasingly complex societal
27 and economic problems. The credibility of government and the political
28 relationships between the people and their leaders will be enhanced.

29 (3) It is the intent of the legislature to facilitate public and
30 private planning and decision-making processes and to strengthen the
31 functioning of democracy in the state of Washington by widening
32 channels of communication and fostering more positive relationships
33 between citizens and public and private institutions. The legislature
34 proposes a structure whereby any small group of eight to twelve
35 citizens meeting at times and places convenient to themselves may
36 receive public information and queries on issues and communicate back
37 to officials, themselves, and the public-at-large their advisory
38 opinions on those issues. It is the intent of the legislature to
39 create a climate in which citizens can act responsibly within their

1 abilities of time and energy to influence decisions affecting their
2 lives and future in Washington state. In short, it is necessary to
3 supplement traditional governmental processes to facilitate the ability
4 of citizens to participate meaningfully and conveniently in the
5 planning processes of government and community that affect their lives
6 in the exercise of their rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of
7 happiness. "We must not perish by the distance between people and
8 government, between people and power." (Dr. J. Bronowski, The Ascent
9 of Man 1973.)

10 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** (1) The office of citizen councilor is
11 created in accordance with section 13 of this act. (Councilor: "An
12 official advisor to a sovereign or chief magistrate." Webster.) Any
13 citizen registered to vote who volunteers to act as an official
14 government advisor may become a citizen councilor on request by sending
15 a letter to the department of community, trade, and economic
16 development or calling a special toll-free number and paying a nominal
17 fee as set by the steering committee. Citizen councilors shall act
18 collectively as official advisors and a sounding board for public
19 officials and agencies, legislative study committees, and the
20 department of community, trade, and economic development on issues of
21 public interest or concern. Conveners of citizen councilor groups
22 shall be those designated by the citizen councilor coordinator or
23 deputy citizen councilor coordinator under section 4 of this act from
24 among citizen councilors who volunteer to host a group. Every effort
25 shall be made to assign citizen councilors to a group that meets at a
26 convenient time and place. Meetings will usually be in residence or
27 work area zip codes.

28 (2) Citizen councilors may participate:

29 (a) In a citizen councilor organizational group under section 8 of
30 this act;

31 (b) In a citizen councilor group usually organized by residence or
32 work area zip code with the assistance of the citizen councilor
33 coordinator; or

34 (c) As an individual if the individual is unable to attend meetings
35 in groups due to age, disability, or remote location.

36 (3) Citizen councilors will be reassigned a group on request to
37 assure that their group meeting place, time, and makeup is convenient
38 and compatible.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The department of community, trade, and
2 economic development:

3 (1) Shall determine suggested issues for public discussion
4 approximately quarterly but not more than monthly from suggestions
5 received from public officials, agencies, legislators, and individual
6 citizen councilors and recommend an appropriate issue or issues for
7 consideration by citizen councilors to a steering committee. The
8 steering committee shall be composed of four voting members: One
9 member of the minority and one member of the majority party from each
10 house of the legislature. Other nonvoting members of the steering
11 committee shall be: (a) A representative from the governor's office,
12 (b) a representative from the superintendent of public instruction, (c)
13 a representative from any organization participating with over fifty
14 groups of eight to twelve persons under section 5(7) of this act, and
15 (d) the citizen councilor coordinator and deputy citizen councilor
16 coordinator selected as provided in section 4 of this act except that
17 the citizen councilor coordinator or deputy citizen councilor
18 coordinator may vote on the steering committee in case of a tie;

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

35 (3) Shall approve the public information materials prepared by the
36 citizen councilor coordinator, deputy citizen councilor coordinator,
37 and staffs and authorize its distribution to citizen councilors to the
38 steering committee for final approval before distribution.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** The offices of citizen councilor coordinator
2 and deputy citizen councilor coordinator are created within the
3 department of community, trade, and economic development. The director
4 of community, trade, and economic development shall appoint the citizen
5 councilor coordinator and deputy citizen councilor coordinator with the
6 advice and consent of the steering committee. The citizen councilor
7 coordinator and deputy citizen councilor coordinator shall serve at the
8 pleasure of the director of community, trade, and economic development,
9 until terminated with the approval of the steering committee, and shall
10 be volunteers and serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed
11 for actual expenses incurred in carrying out their duties under
12 sections 1 through 13 of this act as funds are available.

13 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** The citizen councilor coordinator and deputy
14 citizen councilor coordinator shall:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

27 (17) Maintain data generated for public and media reference in the
28 department of community, trade, and economic development.

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

35 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** The citizen councilor coordinator shall
36 actively encourage citizen councilor groups to form throughout the
37 state. Citizen councilor groups shall usually consist of a minimum of

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

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

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

1 their own materials for tabulation at their own effort and expense.
2 The citizen councilor coordinator may authorize use of the volunteer
3 staff to advise or assist in such projects if volunteers are available.

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

26 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 11.** Each citizen councilor shall be asked to
27 make donations from time to time to help cover the costs of the citizen
28 councilor program estimated at ten to fifteen dollars per person per
29 year at 1995 costs. 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, trade, and
11 economic development may provide the citizen councilor coordinator and
12 his or her volunteer staff with space in existing offices and with
13 clerical services from existing staff to assist in establishing and
14 conducting the citizen councilor program. Appropriations are not
15 required, but the director of community, trade, and economic
16 development may consider the services provided under this section in
17 submitting the department's budget.

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

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

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 14.** Sections 1 through 13 of this act shall
2 expire June 30, 1999.

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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