

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1315

As Reported By House Committee On:
Government Administration

Title: An act relating to the appointment of county assessors.

Brief Description: Authorizing appointments of county assessors in large counties.

Sponsors: Representatives D. Sommers, Sterk, Benson, Sheahan, Crouse, Schoesler and Mastin.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Administration: 2/19/97, 2/25/97 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives D. Schmidt, Chairman; D. Sommers, Vice Chairman; Scott, Ranking Minority Member; Gardner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Doumit; Dunn; Dunshee; Reams; Smith; L. Thomas; Wensman and Wolfe.

Staff: Michael Spiro (786-5793).

Background: Under Article XI, Section 5, of the Washington State Constitution, the Legislature is to provide for the uniform election of county officials. This constitutional requirement does not apply, however, if a county has adopted its own home rule charter. The Legislature may also classify counties by population and in certain counties, provide for the election of county officials who may combine the powers and duties of two or more county officials.

The Legislature has twice amended the laws governing the election of county officials to allow any noncharter county with a population of 300,000 or more to increase its board of commissioners to five members, and to authorize the legislative authority of any county with a population of 250,000 or more to appoint a county coroner.

Summary of Bill: The authority of certain counties to appoint county officials is increased. The legislative authority of any county that has a population of 200,000 or more may adopt a resolution or ordinance appointing a county assessor.

The county's legislative authority must adopt the resolution or ordinance appointing a county assessor. If the resolution or ordinance is adopted, it must be confirmed or rejected by a majority of the county's voters. If the resolution or ordinance is approved by a majority vote, an election will be held for the position of county assessor only if another resolution or ordinance reinstating an election is approved by the voters of the county.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: None.

Testimony Against: The people who are now elected couldn't have greater qualifications for the office of assessor; they bring very strong credentials to their office. The public wants to choose their officials. Independently elected executives are extremely important as watchdogs within county government, and therefore placing all of the controls in the hands of a single group is dangerous. Further, although the home rule charter process is already in place to allow for the appointment of county officials, most such counties have chosen not to do this.

Testified: Fred Saeger, Washington Association of County Officials.