

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5071

As Passed House-Amended:

April 9, 1997

Title: An act relating to school district territory included in city and town boundary extensions.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to territory included in city and town boundary extensions.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Senators Stevens, Haugen and Hochstatter; by request of Board of Education).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/21/97, 4/1/97 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House-Amended: 4/9/97, 51-46.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Johnson, Chairman; Hickel, Vice Chairman; Smith; Sterk; Sump and Talcott.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Cole, Ranking Minority Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; and Veloria.

Staff: Joe Hauth (786-7111).

Background: The Legislature has established statutory procedures for changing school district boundaries. If a town extends its limits to include any part of a school district operating on more than one site, then the issue goes before the regional committee of the educational service district (ESD). The regional committee decides which school district will contain the annexed property. The members of the regional committee are selected by the boards of directors of the school districts in the ESD.

If a town extends its limits to include any part of a school district operating all schools on a single site, or a school district operating elementary schools only on two or more sites, then the ESD superintendent must automatically transfer school district territory that is located within the annexed territory to the school district affiliated

with the city or town that is annexing the territory. In cases involving school districts that operate on more than one site one or more elementary, junior, or high schools, the regional committee may prepare a proposal for transferring school district territory in response to a town annexation. If no school or school site is located within the annexed territory, the registered voters residing in the territory may petition the school district for a transfer of school district territory. If more than 75 percent of the voters petition for a transfer of territory, the ESD superintendent must include the annexed school district territory as part of the school district within the city or town. Under certain circumstances, school districts may directly petition the regional committee to transfer territory from one district to another if no registered voters live in the territory in question.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature finds that the current boundary decision process is archaic, that some current procedural requirements restrict the flexibility of the State Board of Education to respond to proposed transfers, that citizens should have the opportunity to be heard on whether all land in a planned community should be in the same school district, and that current school district organization laws are outdated and need review.

The automatic transfer of annexed property of a one-site school district to an annexing city or town is changed. If a city or town annexes property in a one-site school district and the annexed property contains a school building, then the regional committee has the discretion to decide which school district contains the property.

A regional committee may request, and the State Board of Education (SBE) is authorized to grant, an extension for reconsidering school district territory transfers past the current sixty day period. The SBE must set the duration of the extension.

On its own motion, or in response to a petition by a school district, the SBE must hear and may modify school district boundaries if one of the school districts includes territory located in a city or town with a population of less than three thousand and one of the school districts borders a United States military reservation or includes territory in a United States military reservation. The state board must report any such cases and decisions to the Legislature. This provision expires June 30, 1999.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee must conduct a study of school district organization policies, laws, and rules, and report its findings to the Legislature by January 12, 1998.

A moratorium is placed on proposed changes to school district boundaries from the date on which the act becomes effective through June 30, 1998, with the following exceptions: (1) pre-existing transfer proposals; and (2) school district boundary proposals involving a school district in a city or town with a population of less than

three thousand and a school district with territory located in or adjacent to a military reservation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: School districts want the autonomy to make decisions regarding school district boundary changes. Lakewood School District's boundary should not be changed automatically due to the proposed city annexation. Arlington School District would benefit, but this action should not take place without people making a choice. This bill would be a win for everybody. The goal is to make sure that there is fairness for districts in school district boundary decisions. Both school district boundaries should remain as they are. We urge passage of this bill immediately.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Stevens, prime sponsor; Wayne Robertson, Superintendent, Lakewood School District; and Linda Byrnes, Superintendent, Arlington School District.