

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SJR 8204

As Reported By House Committee On:

Government Administration

Brief Description: Amending the Constitution to provide an alternative method of framing a county charter.

Sponsors: Senators McCaslin and Haugen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Administration: 3/21/97, 3/25/97, 2/24/98, 2/27/98 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 9 members: Representatives D. Schmidt, Chairman; D. Sommers, Vice Chairman; Dunn; Dunshee; Reams; Smith; L. Thomas; Wensman and Wolfe.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Scott, Ranking Minority Member; Gardner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Doumit and Murray.

Staff: Steve Lundin (786-7127).

Background: The state constitution requires the Legislature to enact legislation providing for a uniform system of county government throughout the state, that includes an elected board of county commissioners, and an elected auditor, clerk, prosecuting attorney, sheriff, and treasurer, and such other officers as specified by statute.

The state constitution also includes a procedure to alter this uniform system of county government in any county. This procedure can be initiated by resolution of the county legislative authority, or by petition of county voters, and involves the election of a board of freeholders to frame a proposed county "home rule" charter that is submitted to the county voters for their approval or rejection. Five out of 39 counties in the state (King, Pierce, Snohomish, Whatcom, and Clallam Counties) have adopted such a charter.

Summary of Amended Bill: An additional procedure is provided to frame a proposed county home rule charter that is submitted to county voters for their approval or rejection. The existing process to frame a proposed county home rule charter is retained and not altered.

The Legislature is required to enact legislation creating, and funding, a temporary county home rule committee to draft five alternative county home rule charters. Any one of these five alternative county home rule charters may be submitted directly to county voters for their approval or rejection by either ordinance of the county legislative authority or by the filing of petition that has been signed by county voters at least equal in number to 10 percent of the number of voters in the county who voted at the last preceding general election. An alternative charter may include alternative articles or propositions that are presented for the choice of voters and may be voted upon separately without prejudice to others and apart from the overall question if the charter should be approved. A charter is approved by a simple majority vote of voters of the county voting on the charter.

The temporary committee is composed of 15 members and shall not exist more than one year. Committee members are appointed by the Governor with at least one-third of the members consisting of members of the Legislature and elected county officials. As far as practical, any committee shall be representative of major geographic areas of the state and the state's demographic distribution. A new county home rule committee, with the same membership qualifications and limitation on its existence, may be appointed to redraft any alternative charter whenever legislation is enacted providing for the creation of a new committee.

The ballot title for the constitutional amendment shall be, "Shall an additional procedure be permitted to simplify the process by which a proposed county charter is placed upon the ballot?"

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: An alternative charter may include alternative articles on propositions that are separately presented to voters for their choice apart from the question if the charter should be approved.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: None.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: None.