

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6608

As Passed Senate, February 16, 1998

Title: An act relating to election of councilmembers in first class cities with populations of over four hundred thousand.

Brief Description: Providing for election of councilmembers by districts in first class cities with populations of over four hundred thousand.

Sponsors: Senators Heavey, Schow and Jacobsen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations: 2/3/98, 2/6/98 [DP].
Passed Senate, 2/16/98, 37-12.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chair; Anderson, Haugen, Horn and T. Sheldon.

Staff: Eugene Green (786-7405)

Background: A first class city is a city with a population of 10,000 or more at the time of its organization that has a charter adopted under Article XI, Section 10 of the state Constitution. Article XI, Section 10 states, in part, Any city containing a population of ten thousand inhabitants, or more, shall be permitted to frame a charter for its own government, consistent with and subject to the Constitution and laws of this state. . . – The city of Seattle is a first class charter city and elects nine councilmembers, all at large.

Summary of Bill: Notwithstanding a city's charter, every first class city with a population of more than 400,000 persons (Seattle) must have a city council with nine members. Six of the councilmembers are elected from districts with each of the six elected from one of six districts, and three councilmembers are elected at large. The city council must create a commission to divide the city into six districts. If a boundary change results in one district being represented by more councilmembers than the number to which it is entitled, those having the shortest unexpired terms must be assigned to districts where there are vacancies.

Only a resident of a district may be a candidate for, or hold office as, a councilmember of the district. Only voters of the district may vote at a primary to nominate candidates for councilmember of the district, and only voters of the district may vote at the general election to elect a councilmember of the district. Persons elected to the three at-large positions may reside anywhere in the city.

Every first class city with a population of more than 400,000 persons (Seattle) must appoint a commission to create districts by March 1, 2003. In the municipal election of 2003, if the terms of no more than four councilmembers expire, three councilmembers are elected by

district and one councilmember is elected at large. If five or more councilmembers' terms expire, four councilmembers are elected by district and two councilmembers are elected at large. Provision is made for other than the above circumstances.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Seattle needs better representation from all parts of the city. At-large elections are very expensive in a city the size of Seattle.

Testimony Against: Seattle is a charter city and the people can change their form of representation if they see a need.

Testified: Al and Dona Rousseau (pro); Mike Doubleday, city of Seattle (con).