

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6417

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, January 28, 2008

Title: An act relating to allowing a six percent property tax limit for emergency medical care and service levies.

Brief Description: Providing for an increase in the property tax limit for emergency medical care and services.

Sponsors: Senator Regala.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 1/24/08, 1/28/08 [DP-WM].
Ways & Means: 2/12/08.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Oemig, Vice Chair; Kline, McDermott, Pridemore and Swecker.

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Dianne Criswell (786-7433)

Background: Taxing districts that may authorize an emergency medical care and service levy include a county, city or town, public hospital district, urban emergency medical service district, regional fire protection service authority, fire protection district, and an emergency medical service district. A taxing district may impose an emergency medical care and service levy in an amount equal to 50 cents or less per thousand dollars of the assessed value of property in the taxing district. The growth rate of taxing district regular levy revenues may not exceed an annual 1 percent limit.

Monies from taxes imposed under an emergency medical care and service levy must be used only for the provision of emergency medical care or emergency medical services including related personnel costs and training for such personnel and related equipment, supplies, vehicles, and structures needed for the provision of emergency medical care or emergency medical services.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Regular property taxes in excess of the 1 percent growth rate limitations on revenue may be levied by a taxing district if approved by district voters. This approval is referred to as a levy lid lift. A levy lid lift can last up to a maximum of six consecutive years.

Summary of Bill: A taxing district, imposing a permanent levy under an emergency medical care and service levy, may raise their annual levies by up to 6 percent per year, instead of the current 1 percent.

The Secretary of State must submit this act to the people for their adoption and ratification or rejection, at the next general election held in Washington.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 20, 2008.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Government Operations & Elections) PRO: Emergency medical care and service levies are very important to allow funding these vital services. Voters approved a \$0.50 per \$1,000 of assessed value of property. The problem with this is that we are forced to continually go back to the voters to ask for a tax they have already approved. The cost of the election process is great. It is important that we have consistency in the funding and planning for our services. This is not an I-960 issue as the tax comes at a local level.

Persons Testifying (Government Operations & Elections): PRO: Senator Regala, prime sponsor; Michael Fitzgerald, Tacoma Fire Department.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means): PRO: Emergency medical services are an essential governmental purpose. The Legislature has distinguished EMS property tax levies by allowing EMS levies to be permanent. The permanent levy is a recognition of the primary importance of emergency response. However, the 1 percent levy lid enacted first in I-747 has had the affect of pushing our levy below our 50 cent rate to keep us under the lid, even if the 50 cent rate was earlier approved by voters. Therefore, we have had to go back to voters twice to reapprove the 50 cent rate. The cost to put reapprovals on the ballot are expensive. This bill requires voter-approval on 2 levels: approval by the voters of this state of the EMS taxing districts' authority to have a permanent levy; and a separate voter approval within the specific taxing district of a proposed EMS levy.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Senator Regala, prime sponsor; Randall Lewis, City of Tacoma.