

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6453

As Reported By House Committee On:

Energy & Utilities

Title: An act relating to improving access to state government.

Brief Description: Allowing phone companies and other information providers to include listings for elective officials in their directories free of charge.

Sponsors: Senators Sutherland, McAuliffe, Finkbeiner, Oke and Winsley; by request of Governor Lowry.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Energy & Utilities: 2/20/96, 2/21/96 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Casada, Chairman; Crouse, Vice Chairman; Hankins, Vice Chairman; Patterson, Ranking Minority Member; Poulsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler and Kessler.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Mastin and Mitchell.

Staff: Margaret Allen (786-7110).

Background: A local telephone company is required to provide a comprehensive listing of numbers in its local calling area.

There are 22 local telephone companies operating in Washington; in addition, there are numerous directory publishing companies. Charges levied by a local telephone company for a directory listing are regulated by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, whereas charges levied by a directory publishing company are unregulated.

Under current state law, telephone companies must charge their published rates and, with some exceptions, are prohibited from charging different rates to different

customers. It is unclear whether this law would permit a local telephone company to publish the office telephone number of an elected official free of charge.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature finds (1) citizens need access to their elected officials; (2) rates charged by telecommunications companies for directory assistance create a barrier for citizens living outside cities in which the offices of elected officials are located; (3) the need to use directory assistance has a disparate impact on access to elected officials; and (4) efforts to equalize access to elected officials are in the public interest and consistent with efforts to implement universal service in telecommunications services.

Telecommunications companies and information service providers are explicitly authorized to include directory listings for offices of elected officials at no charge.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This bill addresses inequities between rural and urban citizens by helping to connect citizens with governmental officials. Many senior citizens are moving to rural areas as those areas are less costly places to live in than urban areas. But, citizens in rural areas must go to extra effort to locate the long distance telephone numbers of elected officials. This bill will help senior citizens.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Sutherland, prime sponsor; Kathy Kelly, Office of the Secretary of State; and Virginia De Maris, AARP.