

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6608

As Reported By House Committee On:
Government Administration

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 Administration: 2/27/98 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives D. Sommers, Vice Chairman; Scott, Ranking Minority Member; Doumit; Dunn; Reams; Smith and L. Thomas.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives D. Schmidt, Chairman; Gardner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dunshee; Murray; Wensman and Wolfe.

Staff: Steve Lundin (786-7127).

Background: Article XI, Section 10, of the state constitution, authorizes any city with a population of 10,000 or more "to frame a charter for its own government, consistent with and subject to the constitution and laws of this state." A first-class city is defined in statute to be a city with a population of 10,000 or more than has adopted a charter under the provisions of Article XI, Section 10, of the state constitution.

Summary of Bill: A first-class city with a population of 400,000 or more shall be governed by a nine-member council, six of whom are elected using council districts and three of whom are elected on an at-large basis. One council member is elected from each of these six council districts. This requirement is established notwithstanding any provisions of a city charter to the contrary.

Council districts are used as follows: (1) Only a resident of the district may run for or hold office as a council member from that district; (2) only voters of that district may vote at a primary to nominate candidates for the council member from that district; and (3) only voters of that district may vote at a general election to elect a council member from that district.

The initial district boundaries are established by a commission that the city council is required to create, but the council may alter the council district boundaries from time to time. No change in boundaries may be made within 120 days of a municipal general election or within 20 months after the boundaries are established or altered. If a boundary change results in two or more council members who are elected from districts residing in the same district, those having the shortest unexpired terms of office shall be assigned to the vacant districts for purposes of determining if a vacancy exists.

These council districts are initially used to elect council members in 2003. Provisions are made to stagger the election of council members on an at-large basis and those elected from council districts. If the terms of four council members expire in that year, three council members shall be elected using council districts and one member shall be elected on an at-large basis. If the terms of more than five council members expire in that year, four council members shall be elected using council districts and two members shall be elected on an at-large basis. However, if less than four or more than five positions will be filled in 2003, the commission by lot shall determine a number of positions that will have two-year terms of office so that beginning in 2005 and thereafter either four or five positions shall be filled at each municipal general election, with one at-large position being filled at any election where five positions are filled.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Downtown business interests control Seattle. The city is buying a parking garage for \$23 million more than its actual cost. This is economic discrimination. People are disenfranchised. The vote on the charter amendment was subject to an expensive last minute media blitz. This is an abuse of power.

Testimony Against: This is against home rule and an affront to voters who rejected the charter amendment. Allow cities to experiment with different forms of representation. We can directly amend the charter. This undermines an existing charter amendment effort. This precludes proportional representation. Let Seattle voters decide. This is a solution in search of a problem. It is very unusual to override a charter.

Testified: (All Pro): Senator Heavey, prime sponsor; Midge Batt, citizen; Bob Hegamin, citizen; Al Rousseau, citizen; Dona Rousseau, citizen; Charlie Chong, citizen; Craig Keller, citizen; and Rudy McCoy, citizen. (All Con:) Wayne VonWeesthuizen, citizen; Janet Anderson, Tim Walker, Herman Ross, and Melvin Mackey, Washington Citizens for Proportional Representation; Lori Glenn, citizen, Vivian McLean, citizen, Richard Conlin, Seattle City Councilmember; and Stan Finkelstein, Association of Washington Cities.