

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1271

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations, March 21, 1997

Title: An act relating to public hospital district elections.

Brief Description: Relating to the establishment of commissioner districts and the election of commissioners of public hospital districts.

Sponsors: House Committee on Government Administration (originally sponsored by Representatives L. Thomas, Scott, D. Sommers, Dunshee, Doumit, Mulliken, Gardner, Wensman and D. Schmidt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations: 3/21/97 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chair; Hale, Vice Chair; Anderson, Haugen, Horn, Patterson and Swanson.

Staff: Kathleen Healy (786-7403)

Background: Hospital districts are municipal corporations authorized to provide hospital and other health care services, construct and operate hospitals and other health care facilities, and impose regular property taxes and excess levies to finance their activities and facilities.

A hospital district is governed by a board of commissioners consisting of three members who are elected to six-year staggered terms of office using commissioner districts. Each commissioner district must include approximately the same population. Commissioner districts are used for residency purposes, where a commissioner from that commissioner district must reside in the commissioner district, and at primary elections, where only voters residing in the commissioner district may vote to nominate candidates from that commissioner district. However, voters through the entire public hospital district vote to elect commissioners.

The number of commissioners may be increased from three to five or seven, if a ballot proposition providing for the increase is approved by a simple majority of voters. If so approved, the additional commissioner districts are drawn and the additional commissioners are elected at the next state general election occurring 120 or more days after the ballot proposition is approved.

The board of commissioners may, by resolution, abolish the use of commissioner districts.

Summary of Bill: Changes are made to the election of public hospital district commissioners.

A newly created public hospital district may have three, five, or seven commissioners, who are elected using commissioner districts, without the use of commissioner districts, or a combination of three commissioner districts and the remainder elected without commissioner districts. The county commissioners of the county or counties in which the district is proposed to be located shall determine how the initial hospital district commissioners are elected. Provisions are made to stagger the terms of office.

The additional commissioners in any public hospital district with five or seven commissioners are elected without the use of commissioner districts, unless the board of commissioners adopts a resolution to have all of the five or seven commissioners elected using commissioner districts.

Any public hospital district that has abandoned the use of commissioner districts may reauthorize the use of commissioner districts if a ballot proposition reauthorizing commissioner districts is approved by voters.

The use of commissioner districts is altered to no longer use these districts at primary elections to nominate candidates from the district. Instead, voters throughout the entire public hospital district may vote at a primary to nominate candidates for the commissioner from any commissioner district.

Whenever a public hospital district increases the number of its commissioners, the new positions are filled by appointment of the existing board of commissioners, as if vacancies existed, and the appointed commissioners serve until their successors are elected at the next district general election occurring at least 120 days after voters authorized the increase in the number of commissioners.

If, as the result of redrawing commissioner district boundaries, two or more commissioners associated with commissioner districts reside in a single commissioner district, provisions are made for the administrative assignment of such extra commissioner or commissioners to commissioner districts in which no commissioner resides to avoid a vacancy from occurring.

No appointment to fill a vacant position on, or election to, the board of commissioners of a public hospital district after June 9, 1994, and before the effective date of this act, shall be deemed invalid solely based upon the district's failure to redraw commissioner district boundaries.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: Presently there is some ambiguity in the law. There is a problem with how the at-large commissioners are voted into office. This bill provides needed clarification. An emergency clause is necessary because a vote is coming up in July.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Eric Thoman, counsel, Valley Medical Center (pro); Dierdre Ridgway, Asst. Director, AWPHD (pro).