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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1605**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2016 Regular Session**

**By** House Local Government (originally sponsored by Representatives Peterson, Van De Wege, Griffey, Riccelli, and Fitzgibbon)

AN ACT Relating to benefit charges of fire protection districts and regional fire protection service authorities; and amending RCW 52.26.220, 52.26.230, 84.55.092, 52.18.050, 52.18.010, and 52.26.180.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.220 and 2006 c 200 s 12 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) ((~~Notwithstanding any other provision in this chapter to the contrary, any~~)) (a) The initial imposition of a benefit charge authorized by this chapter ((~~is not effective unless a proposition to impose the benefit charge is approved by a~~)) must be approved by not less than sixty percent ((~~majority~~)) of the voters of the regional fire protection service authority voting at a general election or at a special election called by the authority for that purpose((~~, held within the authority~~)). ((~~A~~)) Ballot ((~~measure that contains~~)) measures containing an authorization to impose benefit charges ((~~and~~)) that ((~~is~~)) are approved by the voters pursuant to RCW 52.26.060 ((~~meets~~)) satisfy the proposition approval requirement of this subsection and subsection (2) of this section.

(b) An election held ((~~under this section~~)) for the initial imposition of a benefit charge must be held not more than twelve months prior to the date on which the first charge is to be assessed.

(c) A benefit charge approved at an election expires in six ((~~years~~)) or fewer years as authorized by the voters, unless subsequently reapproved by the voters.

(2) ((~~The~~)) Ballot measures calling for the initial imposition of a benefit charge must be submitted so as to enable ((~~the~~)) voters favoring the authorization of a ((~~regional fire protection service authority~~)) benefit charge to vote "Yes" and those opposed to vote "No." The ballot question is as follows:

"Shall . . . . . . the regional fire protection service authority composed of (insert the participating fire protection jurisdictions) . . . . . be authorized to impose benefit charges each year for . . . . (insert number of years not to exceed six) years, not to exceed an amount equal to sixty percent of its operating budget, and be prohibited from imposing an additional property tax under RCW 52.26.140(1)(c)?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| YES | NO |
| □ | □" |

(3) ((~~Authorities renewing the benefit charge may elect to use the following alternative ballot~~)) (a) The continued imposition of a benefit charge authorized by this chapter may be approved for six consecutive years. A ballot measure calling for the continued imposition of a benefit charge for six consecutive years must be approved by a majority of the voters of the regional fire protection service authority voting at a general election or at a special election called by the authority for that purpose.

(b) Ballot measures calling for the continued imposition of a benefit charge must be submitted so as to enable voters favoring the continued imposition of the benefit charge to vote "Yes" and those opposed to vote "No." The ballot question must be substantially in the following form:

"Shall . . . . . the regional fire protection service authority composed of (insert the participating fire protection jurisdictions) . . . . . . be authorized to continue voter-authorized benefit charges each year ((~~for . . . . (insert number of years not to exceed six) years~~)) for six consecutive years, not to exceed an amount equal to sixty percent of its operating budget, and be prohibited from imposing an additional property tax under RCW 52.26.140(1)(c)?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| YES | NO |
| □ | □" |

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.230 and 2004 c 129 s 29 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Not fewer than ten days nor more than six months before the election at which the proposition to impose the benefit charge is submitted as provided in this chapter, the governing board of the regional fire protection service authority, or the planning committee if the benefit charge is proposed as part of the initial formation of the authority, shall hold a public hearing specifically setting forth its proposal to impose benefit charges for the support of its legally authorized activities that will maintain or improve the services afforded in the authority. A report of the public hearing shall be filed with the county treasurer of each county in which the property is located and be available for public inspection.

(2) Prior to November 15th of each year the governing board of the authority shall hold a public hearing to review and establish the regional fire protection service authority benefit charges for the subsequent year.

(3) All resolutions imposing or changing the benefit charges must be filed with the county treasurer or treasurers of each county in which the property is located, together with the record of each public hearing, before November 30th immediately preceding the year in which the benefit charges are to be collected on behalf of the authority.

(4) After the benefit charges have been established, the owners of the property subject to the charge must be notified of the amount of the charge.

**Sec.**  RCW 84.55.092 and 1998 c 16 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The regular property tax levy for each taxing district other than the state may be set at the amount which would be allowed otherwise under this chapter if the regular property tax levy for the district for taxes due in prior years beginning with 1986 had been set at the full amount allowed under this chapter including any levy authorized under RCW 52.16.160 or 52.26.140(1)(c) that would have been imposed but for the limitation in RCW 52.18.065 or 52.26.240, applicable upon imposition of the benefit charge under chapter 52.18 or 52.26 RCW.

(2) The purpose of this section is to remove the incentive for a taxing district to maintain its tax levy at the maximum level permitted under this chapter, and to protect the future levy capacity of a taxing district that reduces its tax levy below the level that it otherwise could impose under this chapter, by removing the adverse consequences to future levy capacities resulting from such levy reductions.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.18.050 and 2013 c 49 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1)(a) The initial imposition of a benefit charge authorized by this chapter must be approved by not less than sixty percent of the voters of the district voting at a general election or at a special election called by the district for that purpose.

(b) An election held for the initial imposition of a benefit charge must be held not more than twelve months prior to the date on which the first charge is to be assessed.

(c) A benefit charge approved at an election expires in six or fewer years as authorized by the voters unless subsequently reapproved by the voters.

(2) Ballot measures calling for the initial imposition of a benefit charge must be submitted so as to enable voters favoring the authorization of a benefit charge to vote "Yes" and those opposed to vote "No," and the ballot question must be as follows:

"Shall . . . . . . county fire protection district No. . . . . be authorized to impose benefit charges each year for . . . . (insert number of years not to exceed six) years, not to exceed an amount equal to sixty percent of its operating budget, and be prohibited from imposing an additional property tax under RCW 52.16.160?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| YES | NO |
| □ | □" |

(3)(a) The continued imposition of a benefit charge authorized by this chapter ((~~must be approved by a majority of the voters of the district voting at a general election or at a special election called by the district for that purpose~~)) may be approved for six consecutive years.

((~~(b) Ballot measures calling for the continued imposition of a benefit charge must be submitted so as to enable voters favoring the continued imposition of the benefit charge to vote "Yes" and those opposed to vote "No." The ballot question must be substantially in the following form~~)) A ballot measure calling for the continued imposition of a benefit charge for six consecutive years must be approved by a majority of the voters of the district voting at a general election or at a special election called by the district for that purpose.

(b) Ballot measures calling for the continued imposition of a benefit charge must be submitted so as to enable voters favoring the continued imposition of the benefit charge to vote "Yes" and those opposed to vote "No." The ballot question must be substantially in the following form:

"Shall . . . . . . county fire protection district No. . . . . be authorized to continue voter-authorized benefit charges each year ((~~for . . . . (insert number of years not to exceed six) years~~)) for six consecutive years, not to exceed an amount equal to sixty percent of its operating budget, and be prohibited from imposing an additional property tax under RCW 52.16.160?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| YES | NO |
| □ | □" |

**Sec.**  RCW 52.18.010 and 1998 c 16 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The board of fire commissioners of a fire protection district may by resolution, for fire protection district purposes authorized by law, fix and impose a benefit charge on personal property and improvements to real property which are located within the fire protection district on the date specified and which have or will receive the benefits provided by the fire protection district, to be paid by the owners of the properties((~~: PROVIDED, That~~)).

(2) A benefit charge ((~~shall~~)) does not apply to:

(a) Personal property and improvements to real property owned or used by any recognized religious denomination or religious organization as, or including, a sanctuary or for purposes related to the bona fide religious ministries of the denomination or religious organization, including schools and educational facilities used for kindergarten, primary, or secondary educational purposes or for institutions of higher education and all grounds and buildings related thereto, but not including personal property and improvements to real property owned or used by any recognized religious denomination or religious organization for business operations, profit-making enterprises, or activities not including use of a sanctuary or related to kindergarten, primary, or secondary educational purposes or for institutions of higher education;

(b) Property of housing authorities that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 35.82.210;

(c) Property of nonprofit entities providing rental housing for very low-income households or providing space for the placement of a mobile home for a very low-income household that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.560;

(d) Property of nonprofit homes for the aging that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.041;

(e) Property of nonprofit organizations, corporations, or associations providing housing for eligible persons with developmental disabilities that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.042;

(f) Property of nonprofit organizations providing emergency or transitional housing for low-income homeless persons or victims of domestic violence who are homeless for personal safety reasons that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.043;

(g) Property of the state housing finance commission that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.135; and

(h) Property of nonprofit corporations operating sheltered workshops for persons with disabilities that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.350.

(3) The aggregate amount of such benefit charges in any one year shall not exceed an amount equal to sixty percent of the operating budget for the year in which the benefit charge is to be collected: PROVIDED, That it shall be the duty of the county legislative authority or authorities of the county or counties in which the fire protection district is located to make any necessary adjustments to assure compliance with such limitation and to immediately notify the board of fire commissioners of any changes thereof.

(4) A benefit charge imposed shall be reasonably proportioned to the measurable benefits to property resulting from the services afforded by the district. It is acceptable to apportion the benefit charge to the values of the properties as found by the county assessor or assessors modified generally in the proportion that fire insurance rates are reduced or entitled to be reduced as the result of providing the services. Any other method that reasonably apportions the benefit charges to the actual benefits resulting from the degree of protection, which may include but is not limited to the distance from regularly maintained fire protection equipment, the level of fire prevention services provided to the properties, or the need of the properties for specialized services, may be specified in the resolution and shall be subject to contest on the ground of unreasonable or capricious action or action in excess of the measurable benefits to the property resulting from services afforded by the district. The board of fire commissioners may determine that certain properties or types or classes of properties are not receiving measurable benefits based on criteria they establish by resolution. A benefit charge authorized by this chapter shall not be applicable to the personal property or improvements to real property of any individual, corporation, partnership, firm, organization, or association maintaining a fire department and whose fire protection and training system has been accepted by a fire insurance underwriter maintaining a fire protection engineering and inspection service authorized by the state insurance commissioner to do business in this state, but such property may be protected by the fire protection district under a contractual agreement.

(5) For administrative purposes, the benefit charge imposed on any individual property may be compiled into a single charge, provided that the district, upon request of the property owner, provide an itemized list of charges for each measurable benefit included in the charge.

(6) Benefit charges that were imposed by a fire protection district prior to June 15, 2016, on property exempt under subsection (2) of this section are subject to the following:

(a) For a benefit charge that expires between June 15, 2016, and June 15, 2018, the district may continue to assess and collect the benefit charge from exempt properties. If, after the benefit charge expires during this period, voters of the district reapprove the benefit charge, the district may assess and collect the charge from exempt properties for a period of no more than two years after it is reapproved. In the first year after reapproval, the district may collect the full amount of the benefit charge from exempt properties. In the second year after reapproval, the district may collect no more than fifty percent of the benefit charge from exempt properties. After two years, the district may no longer assess and collect the benefit charge from exempt properties.

(b) For a benefit charge that expires after June 15, 2018, the district may not assess and collect the benefit charge from any exempt property after June 25, 2016.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.180 and 2004 c 129 s 24 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The governing board of a regional fire protection service authority may by resolution, as authorized in the plan and approved by the voters, for authority purposes authorized by law, fix and impose a benefit charge on personal property and improvements to real property which are located within the authority on the date specified and which have received or will receive the benefits provided by the authority, to be paid by the owners of the properties.

(2) A benefit charge does not apply to:

(a) Personal property and improvements to real property owned or used by any recognized religious denomination or religious organization as, or including, a sanctuary or for purposes related to the bona fide religious ministries of the denomination or religious organization, including schools and educational facilities used for kindergarten, primary, or secondary educational purposes or for institutions of higher education and all grounds and buildings related thereto. However, a benefit charge does apply to personal property and improvements to real property owned or used by any recognized religious denomination or religious organization for business operations, profit-making enterprises, or activities not including use of a sanctuary or related to kindergarten, primary, or secondary educational purposes or for institutions of higher education;

(b) Property of housing authorities that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 35.82.210;

(c) Property of nonprofit entities providing rental housing for very low-income households or providing space for the placement of a mobile home for a very low-income household that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.560;

(d) Property of nonprofit homes for the aging that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.041;

(e) Property of nonprofit organizations, corporations, or associations providing housing for eligible persons with developmental disabilities that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.042;

(f) Property of nonprofit organizations providing emergency or transitional housing for low-income homeless persons or victims of domestic violence who are homeless for personal safety reasons that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.043;

(g) Property of the state housing finance commission that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.135; and

(h) Property of nonprofit corporations operating sheltered workshops for persons with disabilities that is exempt from property taxes under RCW 84.36.350.

(3) The aggregate amount of these benefit charges in any one year may not exceed an amount equal to sixty percent of the operating budget for the year in which the benefit charge is to be collected. It is the duty of the county legislative authority or authorities of the county or counties in which the regional fire protection service authority is located to make any necessary adjustments to assure compliance with this limitation and to immediately notify the governing board of an authority of any changes thereof.

((~~(2)~~)) (4) A benefit charge imposed must be reasonably proportioned to the measurable benefits to property resulting from the services afforded by the authority. It is acceptable to apportion the benefit charge to the values of the properties as found by the county assessor or assessors modified generally in the proportion that fire insurance rates are reduced or entitled to be reduced as the result of providing the services. Any other method that reasonably apportions the benefit charges to the actual benefits resulting from the degree of protection, which may include but is not limited to the distance from regularly maintained fire protection equipment, the level of fire prevention services provided to the properties, or the need of the properties for specialized services, may be specified in the resolution and is subject to contest on the grounds of unreasonable or capricious action or action in excess of the measurable benefits to the property resulting from services afforded by the authority. The governing board of an authority may determine that certain properties or types or classes of properties are not receiving measurable benefits based on criteria they establish by resolution. A benefit charge authorized by this chapter is not applicable to the personal property or improvements to real property of any individual, corporation, partnership, firm, organization, or association maintaining a fire department and whose fire protection and training system has been accepted by a fire insurance underwriter maintaining a fire protection engineering and inspection service authorized by the state insurance commissioner to do business in this state, but the property may be protected by the authority under a contractual agreement.

((~~(3)~~)) (5) For administrative purposes, the benefit charge imposed on any individual property may be compiled into a single charge, provided that the authority, upon request of the property owner, provide an itemized list of charges for each measurable benefit included in the charge.

((~~(4)~~)) (6) Benefit charges that were imposed by a regional fire protection service authority prior to June 15, 2016, on property exempt under subsection (2) of this section are subject to the following:

(a) For a benefit charge that expires between June 15, 2016, and June 15, 2018, the authority may continue to assess and collect the benefit charge from exempt properties. If, after the benefit charge expires during this period, voters of the authority reapprove the benefit charge, the authority may assess and collect the charge from exempt properties for a period of no more than two years after it is reapproved. In the first year after reapproval, the authority may collect the full amount of the benefit charge from exempt properties. In the second year after reapproval, the authority may collect no more than fifty percent of the benefit charge from exempt properties. After two years, the authority may no longer assess and collect the benefit charge from exempt properties.

(b) For a benefit charge that expires after June 15, 2018, the authority may not assess and collect the benefit charge from any exempt property after June 25, 2016.

(7) For the purposes of this section and RCW 52.26.190 through 52.26.270, the following definitions apply:

(a)(i) "Personal property" includes every form of tangible personal property including, but not limited to, all goods, chattels, stock in trade, estates, or crops.

(ii) "Personal property" does not include any personal property used for farming, field crops, farm equipment, or livestock.

(b) "Improvements to real property" does not include permanent growing crops, field improvements installed for the purpose of aiding the growth of permanent crops, or other field improvements normally not subject to damage by fire.

**--- END ---**