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**SENATE BILL 5537**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2015 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Habib, Miloscia, Roach, Dansel, Liias, and Fain

AN ACT Relating to establishing regional fire protection service authorities within the boundaries of regional cities; amending RCW 52.26.030, 52.26.040, and 52.26.060; and reenacting and amending RCW 52.26.020.

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

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.020 and 2011 c 141 s 1 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Board" means the governing body of a regional fire protection service authority.

(2) "Elected official" means an elected official of a participating fire protection jurisdiction or a regional fire protection district commissioner created under RCW 52.26.080.

(3) "Fire protection jurisdiction" means a fire district, city, town, port district, municipal airport, or Indian tribe.

(4) "Participating fire protection jurisdiction" means a fire protection jurisdiction participating in the formation or operation of a regional fire protection service authority.

(5) "Regional city" means a city with not less than either: Forty percent of the total population of the county in which the city is located, or fifty thousand residents.

(6) "Regional fire protection service authority" or "authority" means a municipal corporation, an independent taxing authority within the meaning of Article VII, section 1 of the state Constitution, and a taxing district within the meaning of Article VII, section 2 of the state Constitution, whose boundaries are coextensive with either two or more adjacent fire protection jurisdictions or a regional city and that has been created by a vote of the people under this chapter to implement a regional fire protection service authority plan.

((~~(6)~~))(7) "Regional fire protection service authority plan" or "plan" means a plan to develop and finance a fire protection service authority project or projects, including, but not limited to, specific capital projects, fire operations and emergency service operations pursuant to RCW 52.26.040(3)(b), and preservation and maintenance of existing or future facilities.

((~~(7)~~))(8) "Regional fire protection service authority planning committee" or "planning committee" means the advisory committee created under RCW 52.26.030 to create and propose to fire protection jurisdictions a regional fire protection service authority plan to design, finance, and develop fire protection and emergency service projects.

((~~(8)~~))(9) "Regular property taxes" has the same meaning as in RCW 84.04.140.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.030 and 2004 c 129 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

Regional fire protection service authority planning committees are advisory entities that are created, convened, and empowered as follows:

(1) Any two or more adjacent fire protection jurisdictions or a regional city may create a regional fire protection service authority and convene a regional fire protection service authority planning committee. No fire protection jurisdiction may participate in more than one authority.

(2) Each governing body of the fire protection jurisdiction or jurisdictions participating in planning under this chapter shall appoint three elected officials to the authority planning committee. Members of the planning committee may receive compensation of seventy dollars per day, or portion thereof, not to exceed seven hundred dollars per year, for attendance at planning committee meetings and for performance of other services in behalf of the authority, and may be reimbursed for travel and incidental expenses at the discretion of their respective governing body.

(3) A regional fire protection service authority planning committee may receive state funding, as appropriated by the legislature, ((~~or~~)) county funding provided by the affected counties, or city funding provided by a regional city for start-up funding to pay for salaries, expenses, overhead, supplies, and similar expenses ordinarily and necessarily incurred. Upon creation of a regional fire protection service authority, the authority shall within one year reimburse the state ((~~or~~)), county, or regional city for any sums advanced for ((~~these~~)) start-up costs ((~~from the state or county~~)).

(4) The planning committee shall conduct its affairs and formulate a regional fire protection service authority plan as provided under RCW 52.26.040.

(5) At its first meeting, a regional fire protection service authority planning committee may elect officers and provide for the adoption of rules and other operating procedures.

(6) The planning committee may dissolve itself at any time by a majority vote of the total membership of the planning committee. Any participating fire protection jurisdiction may withdraw upon thirty calendar days' written notice to the other participating jurisdictions, if any.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.040 and 2011 c 141 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A regional fire protection service authority planning committee shall adopt a regional fire protection service authority plan providing for the governance, design, financing, and development of fire protection and emergency services. The planning committee may consider the following factors in formulating its plan:

(a) Land use planning criteria; and

(b) The input of cities and counties located within, or partially within, a participating fire protection jurisdiction.

(2) The planning committee may coordinate its activities with neighboring cities, towns, and other local governments that engage in fire protection planning.

(3) The planning committee shall:

(a) Create opportunities for public input in the development of the plan;

(b)(i) Adopt a plan proposing the creation of a regional fire protection service authority and recommending governance, design, financing, and development of fire protection and emergency service facilities and operations, including maintenance and preservation of facilities or systems. The plan may authorize the authority to establish a system of ambulance service to be operated by the authority or operated by contract after a call for bids. ((~~However,~~))

(ii) The authority shall not provide for the establishment of an ambulance service that would compete with any existing private ambulance service, unless the authority determines that the region served by the authority, or a substantial portion of the region served by the authority, is not adequately served by an existing private ambulance service. In determining the adequacy of an existing private ambulance service, the authority shall take into consideration objective generally accepted medical standards and reasonable levels of service which must be published by the authority. Following the preliminary conclusion by the authority that the existing private ambulance service is inadequate, and before establishing an ambulance service or issuing a call for bids, the authority shall allow a minimum of sixty days for the private ambulance service to meet the generally accepted medical standards and accepted levels of service. In the event of a second preliminary conclusion of inadequacy within a twenty-four-month period, the authority may immediately issue a call for bids or establish its own ambulance service and is not required to afford the private ambulance service another sixty-day period to meet the generally accepted medical standards and reasonable levels of service. A private ambulance service that is not licensed by the department of health or whose license is denied, suspended, or revoked is not entitled to a sixty-day period within which to demonstrate adequacy and the authority may immediately issue a call for bids or establish an ambulance service; and

(c) In the plan, recommend sources of revenue authorized by RCW 52.26.050, identify the portions of the plan that may be amended by the board of the authority without voter approval, consistent with RCW 52.26.050, and recommend a financing plan to fund selected fire protection and emergency services and projects.

(4) Once adopted, the plan must be forwarded to the governing body or bodies of the participating fire protection ((~~jurisdictions' governing bodies~~))jurisdictions to initiate the election process under RCW 52.26.060.

(5) If the ballot measure is not approved, the planning committee may redefine the selected regional fire protection service authority projects, financing plan, and the ballot measure. The fire protection jurisdictions' governing bodies may approve the new plan and ballot measure, and may then submit the revised proposition to the voters at a subsequent election or a special election. If a ballot measure is not approved by the voters by the third vote, the planning committee is dissolved.

**Sec.**  RCW 52.26.060 and 2006 c 200 s 4 are each amended to read as follows:

The governing bodies of two or more adjacent fire protection jurisdictions or any regional city may, upon receipt of the regional fire protection service authority plan under RCW 52.26.040, ((~~may~~)) certify the plan to the ballot, including identification of the revenue options specified to fund the plan. The governing body or bodies of the fire protection jurisdiction or jurisdictions may draft a ballot title, give notice as required by law for ballot measures, and perform other duties as required to put the plan before the voters of the proposed authority for their approval or rejection as a single ballot measure that both approves formation of the authority and approves the plan. Authorities may negotiate interlocal agreements necessary to implement the plan. The electorate is the voters voting within the boundaries of the proposed regional fire protection service authority. A simple majority of the total persons voting on the single ballot measure to approve the plan and establish the authority is required for approval. However, if the plan authorizes the authority to impose benefit charges or sixty percent voter approved taxes, then the percentage of total persons voting on the single ballot measure to approve the plan and establish the authority is the same as in RCW 52.26.050. The authority must act in accordance with the general election laws of the state. The authority is liable for its proportionate share of the costs when the elections are held under RCW 29A.04.321 and 29A.04.330.

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