

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6415

As Passed House:
March 6, 2020

Title: An act relating to allowing a permanent fire protection district benefit charge with voter approval.

Brief Description: Allowing a permanent fire protection district benefit charge with voter approval.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Local Government (originally sponsored by Senators Das, Van De Wege, Wellman, Takko, Wilson, C., Hunt and Billig).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Finance: 2/27/20, 3/2/20 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/6/20, 72-25.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Authorizes fire protection districts and regional fire protection service authorities to impose a 10-year benefit charge or a permanent benefit charge with voter approval.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Tarleton, Chair; Walen, Vice Chair; Young, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chapman, Frame, Macri, Orwall, Springer, Stokesbary and Wylie.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Orcutt, Ranking Minority Member; Vick.

Staff: Tracey O'Brien (786-7152).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Fire Districts.

A fire protection district is a type of special purpose district created to provide fire prevention, fire suppression, and emergency medical services within a district's boundaries. Districts serve residents outside of cities or towns, except when cities and towns have been annexed into a district or when the district continues to provide service to a newly incorporated area.

Fire District Benefit Charges.

A fire protection district may impose benefit charges on property within the district to finance its activities. The benefit charge is not a per-call charge and is not based on the assessed value of property. It is a fee that applies only to the structural improvements on properties according to the property use and the size of structure. There is no charge for undeveloped land.

Benefit charges may be imposed for a period of up to six years, if voters of the fire protection district approve a ballot proposition authorizing imposition of these benefit charges by at least a 60 percent majority vote.

A fire protection district may continue to impose benefit charges for another period of up to six years, if approved by a simple majority vote. A district loses the authority to impose the third 50 cent property tax levy if it imposes benefit charges, and the benefit charge may not generate more than 60 percent of the district's operating budget.

Summary of Bill:

Fire protection districts and regional fire protection service authorities are authorized to impose a permanent benefit charge, when seeking authorization for the continued imposition of a benefit charge, with approval by at least 60 percent of the voters of the district or authority.

Fire protection districts and regional fire protection service authorities are authorized to impose a 10-year benefit charge, when seeking authorization for the continued imposition of a benefit charge, with approval by a majority of the voters of the district or authority.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There are over 300 fire protection districts and regional fire protection service authorities statewide. About a dozen of these districts use the benefit charge as it requires a specific mix of residential and commercial property to work. When used, the benefit charge reduces property taxes while allowing for budget certainty, reduced election costs, and taxpayer protections. It is a stable and resilient funding source. There are annual public

hearings required of districts utilizing the benefit charge. This allows for public input and individuals to ask questions. There is a process for challenging the benefit charges that the fire department must follow.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Dylan Doty, Washington Fire Chiefs Association; Matthew Morris, Puget Sound Fire Authority; and Bud Sizemore, Washington State Council of Fire Fighters.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.