

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 5496

As Passed Senate, March 11, 2019

Title: An act relating to modification of precinct and district boundary lines.

Brief Description: Concerning modification of precinct and district boundary lines.

Sponsors: Senators Zeiger and Hunt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 2/15/19, 2/21/19
[DP, w/oRec].

Floor Activity:

Passed Senate: 3/11/19, 44-4.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Authorizes county auditors to recommend modifications to precinct division or boundaries to the county legislative authority, which become effective unless modified or rejected.
- Provides exceptions for the requirement that precincts be contiguous.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Kuderer, Vice Chair; Zeiger, Ranking Member; Bailey, Hasegawa and Takko.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Hawkins.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: Although Washington conducts elections entirely by mail, each county is still divided into election precincts for administrative purposes. Voters in each precinct elect precinct committee officers, who have specific constitutional responsibilities. The county legislative authority divides the county into election precincts and establishes precinct

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boundaries, although the county auditor may temporarily adjust precinct boundaries to reflect an annexation or incorporation until modifications are formally adopted by the county legislative authority. Except for such modifications, precinct boundaries must remain constant from 14 days before candidates file to run in the primary election until the day of the general election.

Precincts are limited to 1500 active, registered voters, although the county legislative authority may establish a lower maximum voter limit. Precincts must be entirely within a single congressional district, legislative district, district of the county legislative authority, and city, if applicable. Precincts must be as contiguous and compact as practicable. Changes to precinct boundaries must follow visible, physical features on United States Census Bureau maps, unless changes are necessitated by annexation or incorporation of territory or doing so would impair election administration.

Summary of Engrossed Bill: Precinct Boundary Adjustment Process. The county auditor may recommend, in writing, any adjustment to the division of election precincts or precinct boundaries to the county legislative authority at least 52 days before the beginning of the candidate filing period. The county legislative authority must hold a public hearing on the proposal. If the county legislative authority does not reject or modify the recommendation within 45 days, it is adopted. Precinct boundaries can be modified up to seven days before the beginning of the filing period. Counties may no longer establish maximum voter limits for precincts of less than 1500 voters.

Precinct Boundary Requirements. Voting precincts must be entirely within or entirely outside a single city or town, and where applicable, an entire city or town council district or ward. Non-contiguous unincorporated areas lying between city, town, or district boundaries may be combined with similar nearby areas into a single precinct. Non-contiguous incorporated areas of the same city or town may be included in the same precinct. The requirement that precinct boundary changes follow visible, physical features on United States Census Bureau maps, with certain exceptions, is removed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This streamlines the process for approval of precinct boundary changes. It allows us to group non-contiguous precincts that may just be a couple parcels of land that may be created when cities annex territory.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Hans Zeiger, Prime Sponsor; Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.