

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1282

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government

Title: An act relating to establishing the office of citizen councilor.

Brief Description: Creating the office of citizen councilor.

Sponsors: Representatives Haigh, Tom, Upthegrove, Jarrett, Murray, Ericksen, Hunter, Shabro and Anderson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 2/25/03, 3/5/03 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Citizen Councilor Program self-funding pilot project.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; Hunt, McDermott, Tom and Wallace.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Shabro, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; and Nixon.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

Some parties believe that citizen alienation from the political process can be alleviated if citizens are well-informed and are given a meaningful and convenient way to participate in political decisions beyond the traditional public hearing process.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A self-funding pilot project is established to improve citizen participation in the political process. Any person living or working in Washington is eligible to volunteer to be a citizen councilor. Citizen councilors, as a group, act as advisors for the Legislature. Citizen councilor groups will be formed and led by a convener. The charge of the citizen councilor groups is to:

1. Gather information and study issues determined to be important to the citizens of the state;
2. Solicit input, comments, and suggestions from citizens and groups throughout the state;
3. Submit by December 1 of each calendar year a written report including the subjects addressed and conclusions and collective advice of the group.

The State Auditor will appoint a Citizen Councilor Coordinator and a Deputy Citizen Councilor Coordinator. Both positions are voluntary and serve at the pleasure of the State Auditor. The Citizen Councilor Coordinator and Deputy Citizen Councilor Coordinator have the following duties:

1. Promote the Citizen Councilor Program and its contribution to the public planning process;
2. Encourage the formation of citizen councilor groups;
3. Appoint conveners of citizen councilor groups;
4. Oversee preparation, tabulation, summarization, and dissemination of data and information;
5. Solicit volunteers to assist in administering the program from community service, educational, civic, business, and other organizations;
6. Distribute informational materials to citizen councilors;
7. Maintain data and documents generated by citizen councilor groups in the State Auditor's office; and
8. Forward written reports submitted by citizen councilor groups to the Legislature.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

In the substitute bill, references to the Forum Foundation, the citizen councilor network opinionaire, and the Fast Forum technique are deleted. The process for choosing topics for public dialogue is not specified. Citizen councilors are not required to pay a fee to participate in the program. The substitute bill does not include an Advisory Citizen Councilor Steering Committee or a Wisdom Council. There are no provisions for creating a revolving fund.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This process can bring about an important dialogue with state citizens and provide a good way to articulate with constituents. It will build public confidence in government. The process is outlined in the book, The Leadership of Civilization Building, and further defined by the Fast Forum technique, which is on the cutting edge of social science.

Testimony Against: This bill calls for a total restructuring of government. With terms such as zeitgeist, one gets the feeling our State Constitution is no longer relevant. This is a form of governance that bypasses the individual citizen's communication with the elected official. None of the people comprising this network are elected, yet they are presenting a form of an initiative to elected officials--without the benefit of signatures.

Testified: (In support) Senator Reardon; Dick Spady, Forum Foundation; Jim Rough, Center for Wise Democratic Processes; and William B. Cate, Washington Association of Churches.

(Opposed) Cris Shardelman, Citizens United for a Responsible Education.