

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6493

As Passed House:

March 3, 2004

Title: An act relating to costs of elections.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to responsibility for costs of elections.

Sponsors: By Senators Horn, Kastama, Roach, Haugen and Esser.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government: 2/24/04, 2/26/04 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/3/04, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Prevents counties from charging cities, towns, or districts for statewide election or measure costs.
- Makes cities, towns, and districts responsible for only the cost of their own, individual elections or measures.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Miloscia, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Shabro, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Hunt, McDermott, Nixon, Tom and Wallace.

Staff: Matt Kuehn (786-7291).

Background:

A city, town, or special purpose district that holds an election in conjunction with a state or county election is responsible for their proportionate share of election costs. If the city, town, or district holds a primary or election independent from state or county elections, the city, town, or district is fully responsible for the costs incurred.

In odd-numbered year elections, the state is responsible for its share of costs related to state officers and measures on the ballot. The state pays no costs in even-year elections. Even-year election costs are borne by the counties and their subdivisions.

In determining shares of elections costs, some counties will first calculate costs related to state officers and measures, factor those costs out and then proration the remaining costs among the jurisdictions with races or issues on the ballot. This effectively means the county assumes the costs related to state races or issues. Other counties will not deduct state costs prior to prorationing. This effectively spreads the costs associated with state races and issues among all jurisdictions with races or issues on the ballot.

Code cities are one of four classes of municipalities that exist under Washington law. Code cities are divided into two styles, charter cities and noncharter cities. Any incorporated city or town may be a noncharter city. If a city has a population over 10,000 it may choose to become a charter city.

A code city is either a charter or noncharter city that has elected to adopt Title 35A RCW. Becoming a code city is optional. All code cities may operate with three one of three different government plans: council-manager, mayor-council, or commission.

A noncharter code city that wishes to change its government plan must gain the approval of a majority of the voters residing in the city at the next general election, provided that the proposed change is made less than 180 days from a scheduled general election. If the proposal for a government plan change is made more than 180 days from a scheduled general election, the city must hold a special election on the issue.

Summary of Bill:

In even-year, statewide elections, cities, towns, and districts are not responsible for any costs involved with statewide elections. Counties are fully responsible for statewide race or measure election costs in an even-year. In odd-years, the state is responsible for those costs.

Consequently, the only costs that a city, town, or district may incur are those costs directly related to races or issues on the ballot of the city, town, or district.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2004.

Testimony For: (In support) Counties have attempted to unfairly allocate some election costs to cities. The bill prevents statewide election cost-shifting by the counties. Cities or districts should only be responsible for incremental election activity costs.

(Neutral) The Association of County Auditors is concerned that the bill cuts out a method that counties may use to pay for election costs, but wish to remain neutral at this time.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Horn, prime sponsor.

(Neutral) Kim Wyman, Association of County Auditors.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.