

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5457

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 20, 2007

Title: An act relating to special meetings.

Brief Description: Providing an additional means of notification of special meetings.

Sponsors: Senators Morton and Benton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/05/07, 2/20/07 [DPS, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5457 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Oemig, Vice Chair; Roach, Ranking Minority Member; Benton, Kline and Swecker.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Pridemore.

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

Background: The Open Public Meetings Act governs the meeting process followed by public agencies. Public agencies must provide notice of special meetings to the members of their governing bodies, as well as to media organizations that request notification. Notice must occur at least 24 hours before the meeting. The notice must indicate the meeting's time and place, and specify the business to be transacted. At the meeting, final dispensation may not be taken on any other matter.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): If a public agency has less than 1,000 registered voters in its voting district, then the agency must provide notice of special meetings to any individual residing in the district who has made a written request to be so notified.

Individuals who receive notice of special meetings may only receive such notice by fax, e-mail, or telephonic message, and not by regular mail.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute): Individuals who receive notice of special meetings may only receive such notice by fax, e-mail, or telephonic message, and not by regular mail.

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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: There is a huge loophole in the Open Public Meetings Act. For example, some citizens who recently requested notification of special meetings from a local fire department were denied. If the public has no way to know when special meetings are happening, then special meetings are actually secret meetings. This is a problem from small towns to big cities like Seattle. This bill will ensure the integrity of the Act.

CON: Small counties are concerned that they might be required to hand deliver notice of meetings to citizens who do not have access to a fax or e-mail. That would be a heavy burden for a county clerk.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Bob Morton, prime sponsor; Debi Davis, citizen.

CON: Eric Johnson, Washington Association of Counties.