

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5701

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 22, 2007

Title: An act relating to establishing a procedure for the election of county commissioners by district.

Brief Description: Establishing a procedure for the election of county commissioners by district.

Sponsors: Senators Benton, Pridemore, Roach, Swecker and Stevens.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/19/07, 2/22/07 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5701 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Oemig, Vice Chair; Benton, Pridemore and Swecker.

Staff: Mac Nicholson (786-7445)

Background: The boards of county commissioners in noncharter counties consist of three or five members. The commissioners are nominated by commissioner district, and elected by voters of the entire county.

Summary of Bill: The board of county commissioners of a noncharter county may be elected by voters of the commissioner district upon approval of a ballot proposition authorizing election by district. The ballot proposition may be submitted to the voters by the board of county commissioners or by a petition signed by at least ten percent of the voters who voted at the last county general election.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY RECOMMENDED SUBSTITUTE AS PASSED COMMITTEE (Government Operations & Elections): Only noncharter counties with a population greater than 300,000 that are located west of the Cascades can switch to election of commissioners by district. A county that switches to election of commissioners by district can switch back to election of commissioners by voters of the entire county.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill gives counties the option to submit the concept of electing county commissioners by district. Its done in the primary by district, but in the general election, the entire county votes. If they are elected by the district at the primary, the voters should have the option to elect them by district at the general election. Home rule counties have generally chosen to elect representatives by district, and this bill gives other counties the same option.

CON: The membership of the Association of Counties appreciates the voters selecting the option, but it should be put in the context of the comprehensive freeholder analysis that counties must go through when changing their form of government. Good government requires that commissioners govern the entire county and not just represent the district in which they live.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Benton, prime sponsor.

CON: Eric Johnson, Washington Association of Counties.