

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5537

As of February 9, 2015

Title: An act relating to establishing regional fire protection service authorities within the boundaries of regional cities.

Brief Description: Establishing regional fire protection service authorities within the boundaries of regional cities.

Sponsors: Senators Habib, Miloscia, Roach, Dandel, Liias and Fain.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Security: 2/03/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & SECURITY

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: A Regional Fire Protection Service Authority (Authority) may be created for the purpose of conducting specified fire protection functions at a regional level. An Authority may be created by the merger of two or more adjacent fire protection jurisdictions including fire protection districts, cities, port districts, and Indian tribes. An Authority may also be created by a vote of the people that approves an Authority plan (plan), and the creation of the Authority, as a single ballot measure.

The plan is created by a planning committee composed of three elected officials appointed by the governing bodies of each of the participating fire protection districts and departments. The plan must provide for the design, financing, and development of fire protection and emergency services. The planning committee must also recommend statutorily authorized sources of revenue and a financing plan for funding selected fire protection and emergency services and projects. The planning committee may receive state funding or county funding to provide for start-up funding to pay for salaries, expenses, overhead, supplies, and other similar expenses. Upon creation of an Authority, the state or the county must be reimbursed for these start-up costs within one year.

Once the plan is adopted, it is forwarded to the participating jurisdictions to initiate the election process. The required margin for voter approval depends on the revenue sources proposed by the plan. If the plan does not authorize benefit charges or 60 percent voter-approved taxes, the ballot measure must be approved by a simple majority. If however,

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the plan authorizes the authority to impose benefit charges or 60 percent voter-approved taxes, the ballot measure must be approved by 60 percent of the voters.

Summary of Bill: A regional city may create an Authority. Regional city means a city with no less than either 40 percent of the total population of the county in which the city is located, or 50,000 residents. A planning committee may receive city funding provided by a regional city for start-up funding to pay for salaries, expenses, overhead, supplies, and other similar expenses. Upon creation of an Authority, the regional city must be reimbursed for these start-up costs within one year. A regional city may certify the plan to the ballot.

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: PRO: This bill establishes a local option for a regional city. It allows cities that otherwise would not be eligible to take advantage of this governance structure to do so if the municipality meets certain size requirements. This bill would provide cities with another tool in order to provide fire services, which are sometimes impacted when there are budget issues in the city. Sometimes the fire safety budget, which touches so many lives, is compromised by competing budget interests and this bill will allow these cities to use a different governance structure. When you have a fire department in a city and a nearby fire district that want to form a regional fire protection service authority, it is sometimes challenging because the governance structures are different. This bill would allow a city to create a regional fire protection service authority to make merging into one regional fire protection service authority easier. This bill would also allow a city to set up a regional fire protection service authority that will protect them from difficult city budget situations. This bill will facilitate future consolidations and allow for greater regionalization.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Habib, prime sponsor; Geoff Simpson, WA State Council of Fire Fighters.