

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1172

As Reported by House Committee On:
Local Government

Title: An act relating to authorizing fire protection districts to dissolve existing civil service systems with approval from the civil service employees.

Brief Description: Concerning fire protection district civil service systems.

Sponsors: Representatives Schmidt and Bronoske.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 1/29/25, 1/31/25 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Allows a fire protection district that has adopted civil service in its fire department to dissolve its civil service system if specified conditions are met.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Duerr, Chair; Parshley, Vice Chair; Klicker, Ranking Minority Member; Stuebe, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Griffey, Hunt and Zahn.

Staff: Elizabeth Allison (786-7129).

Background:

Fire Protection Districts.

Fire protection districts are established for the provision of fire prevention services, fire suppression services, and emergency medical services for the protection of life and

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property. Fire protection districts are formed through a petition from the residents of a proposed district, a public hearing, and three-fifths voter approval. The affairs of the district are managed by a board of elected fire commissioners.

A fire protection district with a fully paid fire department may provide for civil service in its fire department through a resolution of the board of fire commissioners.

State Civil Service Law.

State civil service law governs the appointment, promotion, transfer, layoff, removal, discipline, and welfare of most state agency employees. State civil service law applies to most state agency employees, unless expressly excluded. For example, civil service law does not apply to the legislative branch, the judiciary, academic personnel, state patrol officers, the chief executive officers of each agency, and certain other staff.

Summary of Bill:

A fire protection district that has adopted civil service in its fire department may dissolve its civil service system if:

- the fire protection district's board of fire commissioners adopts a resolution to dissolve the civil service system; and
- a majority of the civil service employees employed by the fire protection district vote to dissolve the civil service system within 60 calendar days of the adoption of the resolution by the board of fire commissioners.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Fire chiefs and commissioners have asked for this bill. This bill will help them with staffing. Some fire protection districts have civil service but have a hard time filling positions. This bill lets commissioners opt out of civil service with a majority vote of civil service employees. The local labor representative is supportive. Fire protection districts cover areas not in the city. Less than five fire protection districts have opted in to civil service. This bill only affects a small amount of people. It doesn't make sense that fire protection districts can opt in to civil service but cannot opt out. The current civil service system imposes challenges on smaller fire protection districts that struggle with costs and

bureaucratic policies. It can create unnecessary hurdles despite being meant to provide protection. Hiring can be on hold for long periods of time due to staff resignation and not having the quorum required under civil service. Granting fire protection districts the authority to opt out of civil service would reduce unnecessary administrative costs and improve flexibility in hiring, recruiting, and maintaining employees. Recruitment is already hard in eastern Washington.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Suzanne Schmidt, prime sponsor; Frank Soto Jr, Spokane Valley Fire Department; Patrick Burch, Spokane Valley Fire; and Ryan Spiller, WA Fire Commissioners.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.