

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2228

As Reported by House Committee On:
Local Government

Title: An act relating to scissor stair regulations in the state building code.

Brief Description: Concerning scissor stair regulations in the state building code.

Sponsors: Representatives Zahn, Duerr, Ramel, Peterson, Parshley, Lekanoff, Reed, Thomas, Gregerson, Ormsby, Hill and Bernbaum.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 1/16/26, 1/23/26 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires the State Building Code Council (Council) to convene a technical advisory group to recommend changes to the State Building Code (Code) to allow scissor stairs to be used in certain occupancies.
- Requires the technical advisory group to submit its recommendations to the Council in time for the Council to include any necessary updates in the 2027 Code update.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Duerr, Chair; Zahn, Vice Chair; Klicker, Ranking Minority Member; Stuebe, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Griffey, Hall and Parshley.

Staff: Kellen Wright (786-7134).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The State Building Code Council (Council) is a state agency responsible for the adoption of the State Building Code (Code). The Code establishes the minimum requirements and standards for buildings and facilities constructed in the state. The Code consists of a series of model codes, such as the International Building Code and the International Residential Code, that are adopted by reference, and any amendments that the Council makes to the codes. The model codes are updated every three years. The Council must adopt amendments to the Code on a three-year cycle that follows the model code adoption cycle. Substantive amendments to the Code may generally only be made once during the update cycle.

Any person may petition the Council in writing to amend the Code during time periods established by the Council. The Council can convene technical advisory groups (TAGs) to review petitions for amendments. Technical advisory groups may include one councilmember, but otherwise must consist of subject matter experts designated by the Council. A person can qualify as a subject matter expert through education, training, or experience that leads to the person being recognized as an expert on a subject, topic, or system. A person who wishes to be appointed to a TAG may submit an application to the Council during an application period. The Council must approve or deny an application within 30 days of the close of the application period.

In order for a petition referred to a TAG to be taken up for consideration by the Council, it must receive the approval of a majority of the TAG.

A fire resistance rating is generally the amount of time that a building component can withstand a fire before losing structural integrity during a standardized fire resistance test.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Scissor stairs are interlocking stairways with separate exits that are separately enclosed and separated by fire-resistance rated assemblies.

The Council must convene a TAG for the purpose of recommending amendments to the Code that would allow scissor stairs in occupancies of more than two dwelling units in which the occupants are primarily permanent. The TAG must consider public health, safety, welfare, and construction cost when making recommendations. The recommendations must be made to the Council in time for the Council to implement any necessary adoption or amendment of codes in the 2027 Code update.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill:

- requires the recommendations of the technical advisory group to be submitted to the Council in time for the Council to adopt amendments in the 2027 update to the Code;

and

- specifies that scissor stairs are separately enclosed and divided by fire-resistance rated assemblies.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This is an important bill for helping to ensure public safety while modernizing the building code to allow for best practices that are already occurring in other countries. High-rise developments occur in Vancouver, British Columbia (BC) but not in Vancouver, Washington, despite high demand. One of the biggest reasons for this is that BC has made high-rise construction efficient in a way that Washington has not. Almost all residential towers in Canada have scissor stairs, which makes the buildings more elegant, allows for a smaller footprint, and adds more density. Scissor stairs are allowed throughout most of the world with a safe track record. Scissor stairs would satisfy ingress and egress requirements while allowing for more units in the same building. Current stairs are forced to be as far apart as possible, and this leads to featureless corridors and requires more space dedicated to stairs. Right now, a property is generally required to be 20,000 square feet to accommodate a high-rise. This bill would allow for high-rises to be built on smaller lots, which saves money. These changes would benefit both high-rise and mid-rise buildings. Rather than two separate exit shafts, scissor stairs are interlocking and allow for two stairs to be put in the same footprint. This would not reduce capacity to exit the building, but would allow buildings to be much more efficient. Even small changes in building efficiency can help projects to get financed. There could be some concerns, but these can be addressed by the technical advisory group experts who will review and make a decision on how to implement scissor stairs. This is an opportunity to tweak the development code to allow for more housing and vibrant cities. Allowing for scissor stairs would give architects more tools and provide more options for consumers. This would benefit not only Seattle, but projects that occur across the state. This would allow a more diverse mix of units and unit sizes, and would allow for more units to be designed with windows, including on multiple sides of an apartment. This bill makes the building code more efficient, and housing more affordable, without sacrificing anything in life safety.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Janice Zahn, prime sponsor; Iain MacKenzie, TVA Architects; Markus Johnson; Bryce Yadon, Futurewise; Matt Huthins, CAST architecture;

and Matt Roewe, RoeweWORKS.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.