

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5995

As Passed House:

March 4, 2026

Title: An act relating to moneys available to a port district allocated for the purchase of zero and near zero emission cargo handling equipment.

Brief Description: Concerning moneys available to a port district allocated for the purchase of zero and near zero emission cargo handling equipment.

Sponsors: Senators Salomon, Wilson, J. and Hasegawa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 2/18/26, 2/20/26 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/4/26, 77-17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Removes the expiration date on the authorization for port districts and port development authorities to purchase zero and near zero emissions cargo handling equipment, and on the prohibition on districts and authorities purchasing fully automated marine cargo handling equipment.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Duerr, Chair; Zahn, Vice Chair; Hall and Parshley.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Stuebe, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Griffey.

Staff: Kellen Wright (786-7134).

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.

Background:

Port districts are a type of special purpose district that can be created with voter approval. Port districts are empowered to acquire, construct, maintain, operate, develop, and regulate harbor improvements; rail or motor transfer and terminal facilities; water transfer and terminal facilities; air transfer or terminal facilities; other commercial transportation, transfer, handling, storage, and terminal facilities; and industrial improvements. Port districts can charge fees for the use or lease of their facilities and can impose property tax levies. Currently, there are 75 port districts in Washington.

A port development authority can be created by a port district, or jointly by two port districts if both are located in counties that had a population of more than 800,000 people on July 24, 2015, to manage the maritime activities of the port district or districts. The Port of Seattle and the Port of Tacoma have formed a port development authority.

Marine cargo can come in various forms. For example, cargo can be transported unpackaged as bulk cargo or in individual containers like barrels as break bulk cargo. Most nonbulk cargo is transported by standardized container. Such containers can be transferred between different modes of transportation without removing the cargo from the container. Ports use a variety of equipment and machinery to handle cargo, including, among other things, cranes, straddle carriers, and reach stackers.

Port districts and port development authorities are authorized to use funds to purchase zero and near zero emissions cargo handling equipment and related infrastructure for the use of the district, the authority, or lessees or tenants of the district or authority.

Districts and authorities are prohibited, however, from using funds to purchase fully automated marine container cargo handling equipment that is remotely operated or monitored, whether or not a human controls the equipment or can intervene to control the equipment.

The authorization to purchase zero and near zero emissions cargo handling equipment, and the prohibition on purchasing fully automated marine cargo handling equipment, expires on December 31, 2031.

Summary of Bill:

The December 31, 2031, expiration date on the authorization for port districts and port development authorities to purchase zero and near zero emissions cargo handling equipment, and on the prohibition on the districts and authorities purchasing fully automated marine cargo handling equipment, is repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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) Port districts cannot fully automate and replace jobs, and this bill removes the sunset clause on that prohibition. There is a need to guarantee working wage family jobs at ports, which is part of the reason that we have those ports. This bill will protect jobs. We should not engage in a race to the bottom on automation, and taking action here may allow other ports elsewhere to do the same. Infrastructure dollars can be a great investment and improve competitiveness. The majority of cargo handling equipment is not purchased by ports, and most port operators are big companies controlled by private equity. The bill does not prevent these companies from purchasing this equipment, but it is generally more expensive and buying the equipment usually does not pencil out unless public money is provided. If private companies want to automate, they should pay for it, and tax dollars should not be used to remove the jobs of people on the docks. Automation shifts costs to others, and results in the erosion of jobs and in fewer families raising kids on solid union benefits. We should keep ports operating efficiently with human oversight. Some cranes are automated, and there is a fear that workers will not be able to keep their jobs. Workers inject life and money back into the economy, which a robot can never do. Workers bring money all over Washington state, and communities depend on this. More jobs would be lost than gained through automation. The gains would go to multinational shipping companies and will not be spent in Washington. We should never make it a practice of cannibalizing the economy with our own tax money. Zero emission human operated equipment could be purchased. There is support for green equipment when workers are in control of it. Taxpayers should not underwrite automation and eliminate jobs. We should not be automating on the backs of workers. Tariffs have had a negative effect on cargo volume at ports, but automation will not improve this. This bill is about safety. Automation is not a solution but a threat. Human supervision is necessary and needed to ensure safety. Automated systems are not good at handling emergency situations. Ship crews want to know that there is a person there when something is going wrong. They need to be able to look in the eye of the crane operator and those operating the docks. Automated systems need more maintenance. Skilled workers are needed to operate this machinery, and a human needs to be in the driver's seat. Automation has already cut the number of clerks needed, and this has reduced efficiency. Worker skill and competency are irreplaceable. This is not all about individual ports, but about looking at the future of all ports in the state. We need to think of big picture on the economy and to keep people working.

(Opposed) It is vital to make sure ports are strong and that they provide jobs throughout economy, not just at docks. The biggest challenge today is the lack of competitiveness at ports, and this is shown by long-term drop in cargo volumes. Volume has declined by 20 percent over the last 20 years. If there is more cargo moving through the port, then there

will be more jobs. This bill removes the potential to invest money that would increase competitiveness in ports, which already represent substantial public investment. The expiration date should remain in place so that issue can be further considered.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Jesse Salomon, prime sponsor; Dan McKisson, President, ILWU WA Area District Council; Sarah Esch, ILWU Local 19; Meghan Mason, ILWU Local 23; Nicholas Matson, ILWU Local 51; Kesa Sten, ILWU Local 52; and Dan Twohig, International Association of Masters, Mates and Pilots.

(Opposed) Scott Hazlegrove, Pacific Merchant Shipping Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.