

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SCR 8406

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Brief Description: Reestablishing the joint select committee on civic health.

Sponsors: Senators Lovick, Muzzall, Conway, Liias, Nobles, Pedersen, Slatter, Stanford and Wilson, C.; by request of Lieutenant Governor.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/18/26, 2/20/26 [DP].

Brief Summary of Concurrent Resolution

- Reestablishes the Joint Select Committee on Civic Health to build upon the work of the Project for Civic Health.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Mena, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Doglio and Farivar.

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

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

In 2023 the Project for Civic Health (Project) was initiated by the Office of the Lieutenant Governor in partnership with the Henry M. Jackson Foundation, University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy and Governance, and the William D. Ruckelshaus Center. The partnership was formed on the shared premise of concern for the civic health of

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democracy. The initial stage of the Project involved convening community leaders, former and current elected officials, and youth in a series of roundtable discussions to discover the nature of the problem and its causes, as well as to solicit ideas to restore higher standards for respectful disagreement. The roundtable discussions were formalized into a report titled *Common Ground for the Common Good*, which includes a menu of potential solutions that were discussed, such as: creating training programs for candidates and elected leaders on respectful dialogue; celebrating, promoting, and rewarding bipartisan collaboration; bolstering credible local news media; creating more robust civic education for youth and adults; finding ways to preserve the benefits of social media while diminishing its harms; working on unifying civic projects; and building media literacy.

The roundtable report served as a foundation for discussions at the Project for Civic Health Summit, held on October 19, 2023. The purpose of the summit was to convene individuals from across the state to discuss the state of civic health in Washington and explore ways for sustained action to improve civic health in the state.

In 2024 the Legislature established the Joint Select Committee on Civic Health to build upon the work of the Project. The committee consists of 13 members:

- the Lieutenant Governor;
- three members of the majority party and three members of the minority party of the Senate, selected by the President of the Senate; and
- three members of the majority party and three members of the minority party of the House of Representatives, selected by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Lieutenant Governor serves as the chair of the committee, and one member of the majority party and one member of the minority party from opposite chambers serve as vice chairs.

The committee issued its final recommendations and report in January 2026 and subsequently expired. Prior to its termination, the committee members unanimously endorsed the idea of continuing the committee and expanding the membership from three members of each caucus to four members.

Summary of Bill:

The Joint Select Committee on Civic Health is reestablished to build upon the work of the Project for Civic Health.

As reestablished, the committee consists of 17 members:

- the Lieutenant Governor;
- four members of the majority party and four members of the minority party of the Senate, to be selected by the President of the Senate; and
- four members of the majority party and four members of the minority party of the

House of Representatives, to be selected by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

All expenses and staff support for the committee shall be provided by the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, except that travel expenses of legislative members will be reimbursed by the Senate and House of Representatives.

The committee must issue a report on its work to the Legislature prior to the 2027, 2028, and 2029 regular legislative sessions. Authorization for the committee expires at the start of the 2029 regular legislative session.

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) The Joint Select Committee on Civic Health is a positive and productive example of good civic health. This is a bipartisan committee, and it is educational to witness how members of the committee can discuss a broad range of ideas and have very different approaches to policy, yet speak civilly to each other. One highlight of a committee meeting was when Roelf Meyer, a former politician from South Africa, spoke to the committee about the work that he did to bring apartheid to an end. Fostering good civic health requires policymakers to think of things consequentially. Given the political climate, civic health needs to be restored across the state's entire landscape and it is important to build civic capacity from the ground up in rural communities and throughout the state. Rebuilding this civic capacity in small towns and in large cities where people tend to not feel like they have any responsibility or access will help everyone to have shared stewardship over state resources and the institutions that provide them. Society is in a virtuous civic cycle that is in the midst of a breakdown. It is therefore more critical than ever to do the work of restoring civic health so that all voices across the state can be heard and represented in public policy. Continuing the work of the committee will help policymakers to figure out what more can be done to bring people from different political spectrums together to just have a conversation with each other.

The suggestion to expand the membership of the committee from three members from each political caucus to four is as a direct result of more legislators asking to be a part of these deliberations and this effort to improve the civic health of democracy.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator John Lovick, prime sponsor; Denny Heck, Lt. Governor; Mary Dye, WA House of Representatives; and Anthony Mixer, Citizen Volunteer Lobbyist.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.