

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5018

As of January 16, 2025

Title: An act relating to the geographic composition of county weed boards.

Brief Description: Concerning the geographic composition of county weed boards.

Sponsors: Senator Wilson, J..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Local Government: 1/16/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Reduces the number of County Noxious Weed Control Board (Board) members appointed from geographical areas from five to four, and establishes one at-large member.
- Removes the requirement that applicants provide a list of voters supporting their nomination.
- Allows the Board to post the notice of expiration of term on the district website and removes the requirement that the Board publish list of recommended nominees in a newspaper.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Staff: Rohan Bhattacharjee (786-7534)

Background: County Noxious Weed Control Boards. Each county may activate a County Noxious Weed Control Board (Board) within its jurisdiction. The Board consists of five voting members appointed by the county legislative authority. The county legislative authority divides the county into five geographical areas and appoints a voting member from each geographical area. At least four members must be engaged in primary production of agricultural products. Board members serve until their replacements are appointed.

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.

Board Nominations. Notice of a Board term expiration must be published in a weekly or daily general circulation newspaper in the geographical area with the last publication occurring at least ten days prior to the nomination.

Residents of the geographical area interested in appointment to the Board must make a written application that includes the signatures of at least ten registered voters residing in the geographical area supporting the nomination. The Board, after a hearing, recommends the names of the most qualified candidates to the county legislative authority. The Board must post the names of those nominees in the county courthouse or county website and publish the names in at least one general circulation newspaper in the county.

Summary of Bill: County Noxious Weed Control Boards. The county legislative authority must divide the county into four geographical areas instead of five. A voting member is appointed from each of the four geographical areas, and one at-large member is appointed as the fifth voting member.

Board Nominations. The Board may post notice of expiration on the district's website at least ten days prior to the nomination, as an alternative to publishing the notice in a weekly or daily general circulation newspaper.

The requirement that residents of the geographical area interested in appointment to the Board include, in their written application, signatures of at least ten registered voters residing in the geographical area supporting the nomination, is removed. The requirement that the Board publish the list of recommended nominees in at least one general circulation newspaper in the county, is removed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The noxious weed control boards are important and made up of volunteers. However, challenges persist pertaining to vacant board positions and enforcement issues. The punitive nature of current regulations under WAC 16.750 is emphasized. The bill aims to address these issues by making the appointment process more flexible, filling board vacancies, and ensuring representation for affected residents. The prime sponsor stressed the need for solutions and expresses openness to refining the bill. Supporters of the bill emphasize that the current application process is burdensome and deters public participation. Streamlining the process would make it easier for community members, many of whom balance multiple jobs and volunteer roles,

to engage in these important boards.

OTHER: Concerns are raised about some proposed changes, particularly the requirement to redistrict geographic regions and the removal of the vetting process, which includes obtaining ten signatures from registered voters. They argue these changes would impose undue burdens on functional boards and potentially weaken community trust and regulatory balance. Some suggest that issues of board vacancies might stem from factors beyond the structure of weed laws, such as shifting community demographics or local politics. Maintaining existing models for boards that function well and providing alternative temporary solutions for struggling boards is preferred.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Jeff Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Jennifer Colvin.

OTHER: Mary Fee, WA State Noxious Weed Control Board; Jennifer Mendoza.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.