SENATE BILL REPORT
SB 5994

As of January 19, 2026

Title: An act relating to preserving timber tax distributions for school districts with recent school district levy failures.

Brief Description: Preserving timber tax distributions for school districts with recent school district levy failures.

Sponsors: Senators Cortes, Frame, Lovelett and Shewmake.

Brief History:
Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 1/19/26.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes school districts without qualifying excess levies in a given calendar year to use the highest levy rate in effect in the previous two calendar years, if any, for purpose of calculating local timber tax distributions.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Tianyi Lan (786-7432)

Background: Timber Tax. Instead of property taxes, timber owners, also referred as timber harvesters, pay a 5 percent excise tax, known as the forest tax or timber tax, on any timber harvested. The excise tax amount due from each timber harvester is based on the value of the timber harvested. The timber excise tax collected by the Department of Revenue (DOR) is composed of a 4 percent county tax and a 1 percent state tax.

Distribution of Timber Tax. County taxes are distributed to the county where the timber was harvested. It helps fund capital projects, voter-approved bonds, school maintenance and operations, county roads, libraries, and fire districts. State taxes are deposited in the state

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general fund.

The State Treasurer's Office distributes the receipts, minus the DOR administrative fee, to counties on a quarterly basis. County receipts are further distributed to local taxing districts by the county treasurers. The distribution amounts depend on each district's levy rate for the current year as well as the district's timber assessed value (TAV) and the actual amount of timber excise taxes collected.

Funds go first to districts that have voter-approved excess levies for capital purposes. The distribution amount equals to the district's TAV times excess levy rate for the current calendar year. Next, school districts receive funds equal to the greater of one-half of the district's TAV or 80 percent of the timber roll of such district in calendar year 1983, multiplied by the district's excess levy rate for the current calendar year. The remainder is distributed to each taxing district generally in proportion to the TAV of each district.

Summary of Bill: This bill extends timber tax distributions to school districts without qualifying levies in a given calendar year, if they had qualifying levies in effect in either of the previous two calendar years. The highest levy rate in effect during the two previous calendar years must be used to calculate timber tax distributions.

This bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 8, 2026.

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

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The bill directs timber taxes going to schools and making a difference in the same local communities that members of the industry live, work, and play in. A rising issue is that statewide timber harvests are at the lowest levels since the Great Depression, contributed to a number of factors including markets, local, state, federal and international policies.

The bill extends timber excise taxes to school districts in the case of a levy expiration. Another revenue related to timber is state forest transfer lands managed by the Department of Natural Resources. Those lands are given by counties to the state to manage and trust. Applying the same policy to those lands can be hugely impactful at the local school district level and the state level.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Matt Doumit, Washington Forest Protection Association; Heath Heikkila, American Forest Resource Council.

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