

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5332

As Passed Senate, March 7, 2013

Title: An act relating to voter-approved benefit charges for fire protection districts.

Brief Description: Modifying the percentage of votes required to continue benefit charges for fire protection districts.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Governmental Operations (originally sponsored by Senators Roach, Nelson, Rolfes, Conway, Fain and Delvin).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Governmental Operations: 2/11/13, 2/18/13 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 3/07/13, 33-16.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5332 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Benton, Vice Chair; Hasegawa, Ranking Member; Braun, Conway, Fraser and Rivers.

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: Fire protection districts are created to provide fire prevention, fire suppression, and emergency services within a district's boundaries. A fire protection district may be established through voter approval. A fire protection district is governed by a board of commissioners (board) composed of three, five, or seven members who are registered voters residing in the district. The board must hold regular monthly meetings and may call special meetings at any time under the Open Public Meetings Act. A fire protection district has the powers and authorities of a municipal corporation. A fire protection district may be financed by imposing regular property taxes, excess voter-approved property tax levies, and benefit charges.

A benefit charge is a type of assessment imposed upon a property owner based upon the measurable benefits to be received by the property owner by fire protection districts and fire protection authorities. A district or authority may use this funding approach as a means for apportioning the real costs of service to an individual property in a manner that reflects the actual benefits provided to that property. The imposition of a benefit charge is subject to

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voter approval by a 60 percent majority of the voters living within the jurisdiction of the district. Subject to such voter approval, a district has the option of imposing benefit charges in lieu of a portion of the property tax it is otherwise authorized to impose.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The continued imposition of a benefit charge is subject to voter approval by a simple majority of the voters living within the jurisdiction of the fire protection district.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: The intent of this bill is to allow the reauthorization of a fire benefit charge to be approved by 50 percent of the voters in the fire protection district. The intent of this bill was to require a 60 percent majority of voters in the district for the initial imposition of a benefit charge and a simple majority for renewal of the benefit charge.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Geoff Simpson, WA State Council of Fire Fighters; Edward Widdis, Snohomish County Fire District 1.