

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1715

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*As Reported By House Committee on:  
State Government*

**Title:** An act relating to nonpartisan sheriffs.

**Brief Description:** Making the office of sheriff nonpartisan.

**Sponsor(s):** Representatives Rasmussen, Brumsickle, Haugen, Bowman, Dorn, Paris and Sheldon.

**Brief History:**

Reported by House Committee on:  
State Government, March 6, 1991, DPS.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
STATE GOVERNMENT**

**Majority Report:** *That Substitute House Bill No. 1715 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.* Signed by 8 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Pruitt, Vice Chair; Bowman, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler; Grant; Moyer; O'Brien; and Sheldon.

**Minority Report:** *Do not pass.* Signed by 2 members: Representatives McLean, Ranking Minority Member; and R. Fisher.

**Staff:** Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

**Background:** Article XI, Section 5 of the state's constitution requires the Legislature to provide uniform laws for the election of sheriffs. Article XI, Section 4 permits the voters of a county to prepare and adopt a "Home Rule" county charter and Article XI, Section 16 permits voters to prepare and adopt "Home Rule" charters for combined city and county governments. These charters may prescribe characteristics of county government and of its officers which are different than those prescribed by the Legislature's uniform laws.

The uniform laws adopted by the Legislature for counties declare the office of county sheriff to be a partisan office.

**Summary of Substitute Bill:** The office of county sheriff is declared to be a nonpartisan office under the state's uniform laws for noncharter counties.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** The substitute clarifies that the bill does not affect the partisan or nonpartisan characteristic of sheriff offices under "Home Rule" charters.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date of Substitute Bill:** The bill takes effect on July 1, 1992.

**Testimony For:** (1) Making the position of sheriff a nonpartisan office will assist in making the office more professional. (2) The various components of the state's criminal justice system should be nonpartisan to assure the public that laws are applied impartially. (3) Sheriffs do not set policy, they simply enforce the laws made by the Legislature and the county legislative authority.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Witnesses:** Representative Rasmussen (in favor); Representative Brumsickle; Gary Edwards, Thurston County Sheriff (in favor); and Bill Closner, WA Association of Sheriffs and Chiefs (in favor).