

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HJR 4201

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*As Reported By House Committee on:  
Local Government*

**Brief Description:** Amending the Constitution to provide an alternative method of framing a county charter.

**Sponsor(s):** Representatives Ferguson, Haugen, Horn, Roland, Wood, Zellinsky, D. Sommers, Winsley, Nealey, Nelson and Fraser.

**Brief History:**

Reported by House Committee on:  
Local Government, January 29, 1991, DP.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Majority Report:** *Do pass.* Signed by 14 members: Representatives Haugen, Chair; Ferguson, Ranking Minority Member; Mitchell, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bray; Edmondson; Franklin; Horn; Nealey; Nelson; Rayburn; Roland; Wood; Wynne; and Zellinsky.

**Staff:** Steve Lundin (786-7127).

**Background:** The State Constitution requires the Legislature to enact legislation providing for a uniform system of county government throughout the state, that includes an elected board of county commissioners, and an elected auditor, clerk, prosecuting attorney, sheriff, and treasurer, and such other officers as specified by statute.

The State Constitution provides for a process to alter county government in any county. This process can be initiated by resolution of the county legislative authority, or by petition of county voters, and involves the election of a board of freeholders to frame a proposed county "home rule" charter that is submitted to the county voters for their approval or rejection. A county "home rule" charter can alter the make-up of county government. Five out of 39 counties in the state (King, Pierce, Snohomish, Whatcom, and Clallam Counties) have adopted such a charter.

**Summary of Bill:** An alternative process is provided for the framing of a proposed county "home rule" charter that is submitted to county voters for their approval or rejection.

This alternative process involves the appointment of a fifteen member temporary county "home rule" commission by the governor to draft five alternative county "home rule" charters. The temporary commission could exist no longer than one year. At least one-third of the commission members must be members of the Legislature and elected county officials. Any one of these alternative county "home rule" charters could be placed directly on the ballot for the approval or rejection of county voters in the same manner as the existing process is initiated to frame a proposed county charter, ie., by either resolution of the county legislative authority, or by the filing of petition that has been signed by county voters at least equal in number to ten percent of the number of voters in the county who voted at the last preceding general election.

The ballot title for the constitutional amendment shall be "Shall an additional procedure be permitted to simplify the process by which a proposed county charter is placed upon the ballot?"

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The amendment becomes effective immediately upon certification of the election results of the November, 1991 general election, if the voters approve the amendment.

**Testimony For:** The existing freeholder process is flawed and confusing. This provides an easier alternative.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Witnesses:** Gary Lowe, Washington Association of Counties (Pro).