

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJR 8203

AS PASSED SENATE, FEBRUARY 22, 1991

Brief Description: Amending the Constitution to provide an additional method for a county to frame a "home rule" charter.

SPONSORS: Senators McCaslin and Nelson.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chairman; Madsen, and Sutherland.

Staff: Eugene Green (786-7405)

Hearing Dates: February 5, 1991

BACKGROUND:

The State Constitution requires that the Legislature establish a system of county government for every noncharter county.

The Constitution permits any county to frame and adopt a "Home Rule" charter under a procedure that involves the election of a board of freeholders who frame a proposed charter to revise county government. The proposed charter is then submitted to the voters of the county for their approval or rejection. At present, five of the 39 counties operate under a county charter (King, Pierce, Snohomish, Whatcom and Clallam).

SUMMARY:

An alternative method is provided for placing a proposed county "Home Rule" charter before the voters. The Legislature is required to create a temporary commission of 15 members to draft five alternative county charters revising county government. The commission may not exist more than one year. The members are to be appointed by the Governor. One-third of the commission members must be members of the Legislature and elected county officials. As far as practical, the commission must be representative of the state's geographic areas and demographic distribution.

A single alternative charter drafted by the commission may be submitted to the voters of any county to approve or reject through: (1) passage of an ordinance by the county legislative authority providing for the submission; or (2) the filing of a petition calling for such a submission. The petition must have been signed by registered voters of the county equal in number to 10 percent of the voters participating in the last preceding general election in the

county. Upon approval by the voters, the charter becomes the fundamental law of the county.

A new commission could be created by the Legislature to redraft any of the alternative charters.

The ballot title is provided in the joint resolution, and shall be: "Shall an additional procedure be permitted to simplify the process by which a proposed county charter is placed upon the ballot?"

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: none requested

TESTIMONY FOR:

It is an additional procedure and may encourage some counties to modernize their governance.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: Gary Lowe, Washington State Association of Counties
(pro)