

**SENATE BILL REPORT**

**SB 5752**

**AS OF MARCH 2, 1993**

**Brief Description:** Creating the citizen councilor program.

**SPONSORS:** Senators Prentice, Moyer, Sutherland, McDonald, Pelz, A. Smith, Haugen, Skratek, Nelson, McAuliffe, M. Rasmussen, Winsley and Snyder

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

**Staff:** Susan Mielke (786-7439)

**Hearing Dates:**

**BACKGROUND:**

The viability of democracy is dependent in large part upon citizens exercising their right to express opinions, listen to opinions, and seek responses and respond to questions from elected officials on issues that are of common interest and concern. The key to the meaningful exercise of this right is effective communication. Governmental entities, when seeking public input on issues, commonly rely on large meetings which by their nature inherently limit the level of direct participation and active dialogue between citizens and elected officials or their representatives. It is suggested that a process be established that would widen the channels of communication between citizens and elected officials and permit citizens to participate more responsibly and meaningfully in the discussion of public issues.

**SUMMARY:**

The office of citizen councilor is created within the Department of Community Development (DCD). The DCD shall direct appropriate issues for consideration by citizens to a steering committee composed of four members: one member from each caucus of each house of the Legislature. Nonvoting members of the steering committee shall be one representative from the office of the Governor, one representative from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and one representative from any participating organization with over 50 groups of citizen councilors.

After approval by the legislative members of the steering committee, the DCD shall assign the approved issues to the volunteer citizen councilor coordinator who shall be appointed by the director of DCD. The coordinator then assigns value reporters to gather information on the issues and distributes that information to citizen councilors.

Any citizen registered to vote may become a citizen councilor upon request to the DCD. Citizen councilors may participate as an individual, or in a citizen councilor group organized by residence or employment zip code, or in a citizen councilor organizational group consisting of citizens who are members of an organization. Groups shall usually consist of eight to twelve members and shall normally meet three or four times per year to study information gathered on the approved state issues. Citizen councilors then anonymously record their opinions on response sheets for tabulation and analysis. An organizational profile report shall be provided without cost to the leaders of organizations with 50 or more citizen councilor organizational groups to inform them of how their members responded.

Governmental units, including counties and municipalities, may request participation from the network of citizen councilors in their general geographical areas, using their own materials for tabulation at their own effort and expense.

School districts are encouraged to organize citizen councilor organizational groups of parents and to obtain a packet of material prepared by the citizen councilor coordinator for high school social studies teachers that enables the students to record their responses on the approved state issues and that provides a basis for citizenship education.

A citizen councilor revolving fund is created and shall consist of donations collected. Disbursements are authorized by the citizen councilor coordinator. The fund is subject to the Budget and Accounting Act but no appropriation is required for expenditures from the fund. If the program fails to support itself and is terminated by DCD remaining funds are deposited in the state general fund.

The program expires June 30, 1998.

**Appropriation:** none

**Revenue:** none

**Fiscal Note:** none requested