

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6055

AS PASSED SENATE, FEBRUARY 9, 1994

Brief Description: Making the minimum salary for county coroners consistent with the salaries of other full time county officials.

SPONSORS: Senators Loveland and Winsley

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chairman; Drew, Vice Chairman; Loveland, McCaslin, Oke, Owen and Winsley.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Hearing Dates: January 19, 1994; January 21, 1994

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BACKGROUND:

The Washington State Constitution was amended in late 1972 to allow counties to set the salaries of their officers. This amendment was codified in the 1st extraordinary session of 1973. Prior to this constitutional amendment, salaries were set at specific dollar amounts by statute. Beginning on January 1, 1974, after the amendment, the specification by set dollar amount continued. The amounts were nominally increased and the county legislative authority was authorized to increase or decrease the salary. No reduction, however, could fall below the amount received on January 1, 1973.

Coroners' salaries for class AA counties were not mentioned in 1974. The salary of \$18,000 for coroners set by prior law was not amended in 1974 for counties of populations over 500,000.

In 1991, the prior references to counties by classes were stricken and references by population were substituted. The salaries listed were to be not less than the stated dollar amounts. These "floor" amounts, however, were not raised from the 1974 levels. In 1991, salaries for coroners of counties of one million or more population were set at \$18,000.

Historically, in counties of over one million, 500,000 or 210,000 population, county coroners' salaries in the relevant statutes have been either the same as, or relatively near to that of the other county officers, with the exception of the county prosecutor. In first, second and third class cities, however, the coroner's salary has been roughly one half to one third that of other county officers.

The county coroner is an elected official. In counties of less than 40,000 population, the prosecuting attorney serves as the ex officio coroner.

SUMMARY:

The salary for county coroners in counties of one million population or more remains at \$18,000. In counties with populations of 210,000 to 1 million, coroners' salaries are raised by \$1,100, to become \$17,600. In counties with populations of 125,000 to 210,000, coroners' salaries are raised by \$7,200, to become \$16,000. In counties with populations of 70,000 to 125,000, coroners' salaries are raised by \$9,400, to become \$14,900. In counties with populations of 40,000 to 70,000, coroners' salaries are raised by \$9,800, to become \$13,800.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: none requested

TESTIMONY FOR:

While no county coroner's salary would directly be raised by this bill's passage, the perception of the coroner's equality with the other county elected, full-time officers would be declared.

TESTIMONY AGAINST:

This bill is not necessary. Since the state Constitution allowed the county legislative authority to set salaries, the county legislative authority is where coroners should look for redress of salary inequities.

TESTIFIED: Dr. Barbara Andersen, Island County Coroner (pro); Paul Telford (con)

HOUSE AMENDMENT(S):

The statutory salary floors for each elected office are repealed January 1, 1995 and then replaced by a general grant of authority to the county legislative authority to establish those salaries. The requirement that the state pay half the salary of every county prosecutor is continued.

A county that has assumed a metropolitan municipal corporation may establish a bi-weekly pay period for its employees and pay compensation up to 13 days following the end of each pay period.

At the request of the person who delivers a document to a county auditor for endorsement and recording, and at the county auditor's discretion, the auditor may return the document to either that person or that person's designees.

The director of public health of a combined city-county health department is appointed without having a specific term of office.