

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2459

As Amended by the Senate

Title: An act relating to public housing authorities in jurisdictions with populations over four hundred thousand.

Brief Description: Regulating public housing authorities in large jurisdictions.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Trade/Ec Dev (originally sponsored by Representatives Veloria, Van Luven, Butler, Cody, Mason, Conway, McDonald, Kenney, Kastama, Dickerson and Keiser).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Trade & Economic Development: 1/26/98, 2/5/98 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/11/98, 95-0.

Senate Amended.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRADE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Van Luven, Chairman; Dunn, Vice Chairman; Veloria, Ranking Minority Member; Eickmeyer, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander; Ballasiotes; Mason; McDonald and Morris.

Staff: Kenny Pittman (786-7392).

Background: The state's Housing Authorities Law, enacted in 1939, authorized counties and cities to establish a local public housing authority. The purpose of a public housing authority is to provide safe and sanitary housing for persons of low-income. This is accomplished through the administration of various federal, state, or local housing programs.

Public housing authorities are governed by a five-member commission. The commissioners are appointed by the mayor of a city or the governing body of the county establishing the housing authority. Commissioners generally serve five-year terms. They do not receive a salary, but are compensated for travel and other expenses they incur.

Commissioners and employees are prohibited from having any direct or indirect interest in any housing project, property, contract for materials or services to be furnished to the public housing authority. Commissioners and employees are required to disclose, in writing, if they have an interest in any property used or planning to be used for a housing project. The commissioner or employee cannot participate in any action by the public housing authority regarding the property. Failure to disclose an interest is considered misconduct in office.

Summary of Bill: The state's Housing Authority Law is revised regarding the appointment of commissioners in cities with a population of 400,000 or more and conflict of interest provisions that govern commissioners and employees.

The required number of commissioners on a public housing authority board is expanded from five to seven in a city with a population of 400,000 or more. At least two of the commissioners must be tenants that reside in a housing project that is owned by the housing authority. The term of the public housing authority commissioners is for five years. A commissioner may be reappointed only after a public hearing of the city council with public input.

The conflict of interest provisions for public housing authority commissioners and employees are expanded to include any appointee to a decision-making body of the public housing authority.

EFFECT OF SENATE AMENDMENT(S): The Senate amendment: (1) reduces the maximum term of a commissioner from 5-years to 4-years only for public housing authorities operating in a city with a population of 400,000 or more; and (2) allows a tenant of a public housing authority that serves as a commissioner, employee, or appointee to any decision-making body of the public housing authority to vote on any issue or decision, or participate in any action of the housing authority unless a conflict of interest exists to that particular tenant.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This is in response to a problem of accountability. Having representatives of community-based on the board of commissioners will ensure that the programs are meeting the needs of the people who need it the most. The expansion of the board of commissioners will benefit the housing authority

Testimony Against: The bill is not needed. The commissioners are appointed to the board by the mayor who takes in the broad-based needs of the community. The bill will

limit the mayor's authority to make appointments to the commission. Reducing the terms of commissioners from five years to three years is not in the best interest of the housing authority.

Testified: Representative Veloria, prime sponsor (pro); Robby Stern (pro); Maureen Bo, Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 8 (pro); John Fox, Seattle Displacement Coalition (pro); Virginia Myers (pro); Kristen O'Donnell (pro); Irv Thomas (pro); Louise Perry, Puget Sound Council of Senior Citizens (pro); Don Wittenbeger (pro); Julie Wade, Seattle Housing Authority (con); Judy Fay, Seattle Housing Authority Commissioner (pro); and Susan Crowley, city of Seattle Mayor's Office (con).