

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2562

As Reported By House Committee On:

Government Administration

Title: An act relating to specifying the number of signatures required on a petition to place on the ballot the question of changing the name of a port district.

Brief Description: Specifying the number of signatures required on a petition to place on the ballot the question of changing the name of a port district.

Sponsors: Representatives D. Schmidt, Scott and Wensman.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Administration: 1/27/98, 2/5/98 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives D. Schmidt, Chairman; D. Sommers, Vice Chairman; Scott, Ranking Minority Member; Gardner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Doumit; Dunn; Dunshee; Murray; Reams; Smith; L. Thomas; Wensman and Wolfe.

Staff: Caroleen Dineen (786-7156).

Background: Port districts are municipal corporations authorized to control and manage specified functions, including harbor and industrial improvements and rail, motor, air and water transfer and terminal facilities. A county legislative authority: (a) may decide to submit a proposal to create a port district to county voters; or (b) is required to submit a proposal upon receipt of a petition signed by 10 percent of registered county voters based on the total vote in the last general county election. The proposal to create a port district is approved by majority vote.

The corporate name of any port district may be changed under certain conditions. The port district commissioners are required to submit a proposal to change the name of the port district upon receiving a petition requesting such a change that is signed by at least 250 registered voters residing in the port district. The name change proposal is approved by majority vote.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The minimum number of signatures required to submit a name change proposal to voters is increased in statute. Port district commissioners are required to submit a name change proposal to port district voters at a general port election upon receiving a petition requesting such a change that is signed by at least 10 percent of port district voters who voted at the last general port election.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Clarifies that the port name change proposal must be submitted at a general port election.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: The name change provision was added to statute in 1929, when voters in Longview wanted to change the name of the Port of Kelso. The 250-signature requirement reflected 10 percent of Longview voters at that time. Because of the low threshold, an election had to be held on a name change proposal in King County at significant cost. Elections are expensive to conduct, and the port district has to pay a proportionate share of the election costs if a name change proposal is submitted.

Testimony Against: This bill creates a hammer on the citizen process. This bill reflects a fear that a problem may occur, but there is no problem. Referenda and initiative thresholds are lower than 10 percent. The bill should be amended to only require the name change proposal to be submitted at a general election.

Testified: (Pro): Representative Dave Schmidt, prime sponsor; and Pat Jones, Washington Public Ports Association. (Con): Sherry Bockwinkel, (CLEAN), Citizens for Leaders with Ethics and Accountability Now.