

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJR 4208

As Passed Legislature

Brief Description: Allowing school levies for four-year periods.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Wensman, B. Thomas, H. Sommers, Talcott, Cole, Regala, Constantine, Ballasiotes, Radcliff, D. Schmidt, Carlson, Clements, Dyer, Bush, Johnson, Cairnes, Quall, Morris, Keiser, Linville, Sterk, Dunn, Blalock, Hatfield, Dickerson, Conway, Thompson, Scott, Wood, O'Brien, Backlund, Cooke, Costa, Ogden, Cody, Kessler, Kenney, Cooper and Gardner).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 3/3/97, 3/4/97 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 4/16/97, 94-3.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Johnson, Chairman; Hickel, Vice Chairman; Cole, Ranking Minority Member; Keiser, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Linville; Quall; Smith; Sterk; Sump; Talcott and Veloria.

Staff: Joe Hauth (786-7111).

Background: The Washington State Constitution specifies that propositions to levy additional taxes for school operating purposes be limited to a period of two years. District operating levies must be reauthorized by the voters every two years.

Any amendment to change the constitution must be approved by a two-thirds majority of both houses of the Legislature, followed by approval of a majority of the people.

Summary of Bill: A constitutional amendment is proposed. The two-year levy authority time limit is extended. Propositions to levy additional taxes for school operating purposes may be for periods of up to four years.

The secretary of state is directed to give proper notice of a constitutional amendment to be ratified by the people.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: Changing a constitutional provision is a serious matter. However, changing the levy period will allow a school district to plan for a longer period of time. There were relatively fewer students when the levy law was originally adopted; today there are almost one million students. The provision merely gives the school districts a longer operating period. Extending the levy period will provide stability to local funding. Reducing the frequency of levies will provide savings, and school districts may decide whether to have two- year or four-year levies. This is strictly a school district option, and is only for maintenance and operations. It is hard to estimate funding needs over a longer period of time, but it is a good policy. Support for this provision is urged because it will provide continued support in the classroom. The levy provisions will move school districts away from a recurring two-year uncertainty cycle. Many school districts will take advantage of an opportunity for longer levies.

Testimony Against: We have a problem with levies and we don't want to wait three years before they improve the community. Saving money by reducing the number of levies is not a savings if it does not improve education.

Testified: Representative Wensman, prime sponsor; Dwayne Slate, Washington State School Directors' Association (pro); Barbara Mertens, Washington Association of School Administrators (pro); Lloyd Gardner, citizen (con); Bob Butts, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (pro); and Karen Davis, Washington Education Association.