

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5287

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As Passed Senate, March 12, 1997

**Title:** An act relating to townships.

**Brief Description:** Repealing Title 45 RCW concerning townships.

**Sponsors:** Senators Horn, McCaslin, Wood, Prince and Hale.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Government Operations: 2/14/97, 2/20/97 [DP].  
Passed Senate, 3/12/97, 45-0.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chair; Hale, Vice Chair; Haugen, Horn and Patterson.

**Staff:** Eugene Green (786-7405)

**Background:** Townships in the United State evolved from the New England "town" which is a local general purpose government typified by the exercise of legislative authority by the entire citizenry acting at annual town meetings. The New England town and subsequent "townships" in the Midwest historically had jurisdiction over roads, poor relief, and, in many cases, education. Towns and townships also sometimes had responsibility for other police powers, but, for the most part, townships have existed in rural areas with limited demand for government services.

The Washington State Constitution permits counties to adopt a township organization and grants townships general powers to enforce local police, sanitary and other regulations not in conflict with general laws. A statutory scheme governing the operation of townships was adopted by the Legislature in 1895 and has been only slightly modified since that time.

A county may divide into townships upon voter approval. When establishing townships, the entire unincorporated area of the county must be included. At an annual town meeting, the residents elect one of three supervisors, and in odd-numbered years, a clerk, treasurer, justice of the peace and constable. At town meetings, the electors may, among other things, determine the number of poundmasters, determine the time and manner in which dogs may be permitted to go at large, make provisions for snow removal, approve the purchase of land for a town cemetery, create a river improvement fund and regulate hawkers, theatricals and ferris wheels. Town supervisors serve as "fence viewers."

Spokane and Whatcom Counties previously operated with townships, but disorganized them. Currently, no county has a township organization.

**Summary of Bill:** Title 45, townships, is repealed.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

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

**Testimony For:** There is no need to keep a title in the Revised Code of Washington that is not going to be used.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** Senator Horn, prime sponsor.