

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJR 8204

As Passed Senate, February 9, 1998

Brief Description: Amending the Constitution to provide an alternative method of framing a county charter.

Sponsors: Senators McCaslin and Haugen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations: 1/21/97, 1/30/97 [DP].

Passed Senate, 3/6/97, 40-7.

Passed Senate, 2/9/98, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

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

Staff: Eugene Green (786-7405)

Background: The State Constitution requires that the Legislature establish a system of county government for every noncharter county.

The Constitution permits any county to frame and adopt a "Home Rule" charter under a procedure that involves the election of a board of freeholders, who frame a proposed charter to revise county government. The proposed charter is then submitted to the voters of the county for their approval or rejection. At present, five of the 39 counties operate under a county charter (King, Pierce, Snohomish, Whatcom and Clallam).

Summary of Bill: An alternative method is provided for placing a proposed county "Home Rule" charter before the voters. The Legislature is required to create a temporary committee of 15 members to draft five alternative county charters revising county government. The committee may not exist more than one year. The members are to be appointed by the Governor. One-third of the committee members must be members of the Legislature and elected county officials. As far as practical, the committee must be representative of the state's geographic areas and demographic distribution.

A single alternative charter drafted by the committee may be submitted to the voters of any county for approval or rejection. The submission is accomplished by: (1) passage of an ordinance by the county legislative authority providing for the submission; or (2) the filing of a petition calling for such a submission. The petition must have been signed by registered voters of the county equal in number to 10 percent of the voters participating in the last preceding general election in the county. Upon approval by the voters, the charter becomes the fundamental law of the county.

A new committee can be created by the Legislature to redraft any of the alternative charters.

The ballot title is provided in the joint resolution, and reads as follows: "Shall an additional procedure be permitted to simplify the process by which a proposed county charter is placed upon the ballot?"

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: There have been many failures and only five successes. This alternative process should assure better charters being presented to the people for their vote.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Gary Lowe, WA State Assoc. of Counties (pro).