

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJR 8207

As of February 5, 1997

Brief Description: Amending the Constitution to provide for a simple majority of voters voting at a state general election to authorize school district levies.

Sponsors: Senators Oke, Winsley, Sellar, Rasmussen, Patterson and Haugen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Education: 2/7/97.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Staff: Karen Carter (786-7424)

Background: The Washington State Constitution gives school districts the authority to collect excess property tax revenues for capital or operating purposes, and to assume excess debt when voters approve a levy or bond issue by certain margins. The constitution also specifies the timing and frequency of such excess- levies and bond elections.

General Obligation Bonds and Debt: A school district is authorized to issue general obligation bonds or to assume debt for capital purposes in excess of set limits only when the number of voters voting on the proposition is not less than 40 percent of district voters who participated in the last preceding general election. Additionally, at least 60 percent of those voting on the proposition must vote yes.-

Excess Property Tax Levies: There are two methods for authorizing a school district excess levy. The first method results in approval if 60 percent vote yes- so long as the number of voters voting on the proposition equals or exceeds 40 percent of district voters who participated in the last preceding general election.

The second method can result in approval where voters turn out in fewer numbers than the requisite 40 percent.- In this case, the yes- count threshold is higher for levy approval. The number of yes- votes must equal or exceed 3/5ths (60 percent) of a number, which represents 40 percent of district voters who participated in the last preceding general election.

Timing and Frequency: School excess levies or bond issues may be submitted at a special or regular election, but not more than twice in a 12-month period. Levy propositions may not be submitted more than 12 months prior to the effective date.

Any amendment to change the Washington State 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: An amendment to the Washington State Constitution is proposed to change the approval necessary for a school district to increase its debt limit, issue bonds or levy excess property taxes. Approval is a simple majority of voters voting on the proposition.

Provisions for the timing and frequency of excess school levies and bond elections are modified. Timing is limited to the state general election, giving districts one opportunity to seek voter approval every 12 months.

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

The resolution contains a statement of legislative finding with respect to single subject rules as well as a null and void contingency clause.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 31, 1997.