

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6154

As Reported By House Committee On:
Local Government

Title: An act relating to giving the county clerk authorization to accept credit cards.

Brief Description: Allowing county clerks to accept credit cards.

Sponsors: Senators Costa, McCaslin, Patterson and Gardner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 2/17/00, 2/24/00 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Authorizes county clerks to accept a variety of noncurrency forms of payment for various court-related fees and for payment by criminal defendants of court-ordered obligations.
- Requires payer to bear the transaction processing costs for these payments.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Mulliken, Republican Co-Chair; Scott, Democratic Co-Chair; Doumit, Democratic Vice Chair; Mielke, Republican Vice Chair; Edwards; Ericksen; Fisher and Fortunato.

Staff: Caroleen Dineen (786-7156).

Background:

County treasurers are authorized by statute to accept a variety of noncurrency forms of payments (i.e., credit cards, charge cards, debit cards, smart cards, stored value cards, federal wire, and automatic clearinghouse system transactions or other electronic communication). These forms of payment may be used to pay taxes, fines,

interest, penalties, special assessments, fees, rates, charges, or other moneys due to counties.

Payers using noncurrency forms of payment must bear the transaction processing costs unless the county legislative authority finds it is in the best interests of county to not charge payers for these costs. Transaction processing costs charged to payers using noncurrency forms of payment may not exceed the additional direct costs to the county to accept these payment forms.

Summary of Amended Bill:

County clerks are authorized to accept a variety of noncurrency forms of payment (i.e., credit cards, charge cards, debit cards, smart cards, stored value cards, federal wire, and automatic clearinghouse system transactions or other electronic communication) for numerous court-related fees. These include filing fees for various legal documents and pleadings, jury trial demand charges, and various court clerks' services. County clerks are also authorized to accept these forms of noncurrency payment for criminal defendants' court-ordered legal financial obligations, including fines, fees, assessments, restitution, and crime victims' compensation.

The payer using the noncurrency form of payment must bear the transaction processing costs.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The amended bill specifies authorized noncurrency payments must be consistent with statutory depository requirements for county treasurers and county clerks.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: County clerks must collect fees before service is rendered, and this bill provides the mechanism for electronic fee payments for electronic filings with the county clerks. The bill assists court clerks attempting to reduce criminal defendants' financial obligations by allowing clerks accept these credit card payments and should increase collections. This is one way to make courts more accessible.

The person paying by credit card, not the county, would pay the transaction fee. The proposed amendment recognizes that many county treasurers have established banking

relationships to obtain lower transaction rates for credit card payments already accepted by treasurers.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Betty Gould, Thurston County Clerk; and Debbie Wilke, Washington Association of County Officials.