

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SSJR 8205

As Passed Senate, February 14, 2000

Brief Description: Requiring a geographic distribution of initiative petition signatures.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senator Hargrove).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State & Local Government: 2/8/99, 2/22/99 [DPS-WM].

Ways & Means: 3/1/99, 3/4/99 [DP2S, DNPS].

Passed Senate, 3/16/99, 36-12; 2/14/00, 35-12.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Joint Resolution No. 8205 be substituted therefor, and the substitute resolution do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

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

Staff: Eugene Green (786-7405)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Second Substitute Senate Joint Resolution No. 8205 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute resolution do pass.

Signed by Senators Loveland, Chair; Bauer, Vice Chair; Brown, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Long, McDonald, Rasmussen, Snyder, West, Winsley and Zarelli.

Minority Report: Do not pass substitute.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Fraser, Kline, Kohl-Welles, Thibaudeau and Wojahn.

Staff: Steve Jones (786-7440)

Background: The Constitution of Washington State vests legislative authority in the Legislature, but reserves to the people the power to propose, enact or reject bills independent of the Legislature. The first power reserved to the people is the initiative. Article II, Section 1, requires an initiative petition to have valid signatures equal to 8 percent of the votes cast for the office of Governor at the last gubernatorial election preceding the initial filing of the initiative.

The number of initiatives certified to the ballot, or receiving the requisite number of signatures, in the last eight years has more than doubled over the previous two ten-year periods. The number of initiatives passed during these periods has remained relatively unchanged.

Summary of Bill: Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution of Washington State is amended to prohibit the Secretary of State after January 1, 2001, from validating signatures from any congressional district in excess of one-sixth of the total number of signatures required for submission of the measure to the Legislature or the people.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: January 1, 2001.

Testimony For: This bill would address concerns of those in rural areas of the state about those in the urban areas dictating state policy and introducing initiatives uniquely beneficial to urban areas at the expense of rural areas by collecting all signatures in large urban counties.

Testimony Against: The bill would create costs to the Secretary of State's Office because it does not have facilities to check addresses or congressional districts and would require new software to do so. There are only 40 days to check initiative signatures. As drafted, statistical checking would probably no longer be possible and would increase labor costs related to checking by 19 percent. The bill would make it more difficult for volunteers to gather signatures. The initiative and referendum are rights reserved to the people in the Constitution and should not be changed. The bill would give veto power to one congressional district over all others.

Testified: David Elliott, Office of the Secretary of State (neutral); Cherie Davidson, League of Women Voters WA (con); Chuck Sauvage, Common Cause WA State (con).