

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2556

As Reported by House Committee On:
Local Government & Housing

Title: An act relating to county auditors' fees.

Brief Description: Revising fees collected by county auditors.

Sponsors: Representatives Dunshee, Schmidt, Romero, Ogden, Edwards, Veloria and McIntire.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government & Housing: 1/31/02, 2/6/02 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Raises the recording fee charged by county auditors from five to nine dollars.
- Increases the surcharge for document preservation from two dollars to four dollars.
- Creates a local government document preservation and modernization committee in each county.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Dunshee, Chair; Edwards, Vice Chair; Berkey, Hatfield, Kirby and Sullivan.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Mulliken, Ranking Minority Member; Crouse, DeBolt, Dunn and Mielke.

Staff: Scott MacColl (786-7106).

Background:

County auditors are statutorily authorized to charge a fee for the filing of documents with the county. The fee for each service provided by the office is set in statute, and the fee for the first page of each recorded document is \$5.

There is also a surcharge of \$2 charged for each document recorded, which is deposited into the auditor's centennial account. Fifty percent of the surcharge is proportionally distributed to all counties to be used for ongoing preservation of historical documents for all county offices. The remaining 50 percent is retained by the county for the preservation of historical documents.

Summary of Bill:

The document recording fee charged by county auditors for the first page recorded is raised \$4 to a total of \$9.

The surcharge for the preservation of historical documents is raised \$2 to a total of \$4, and deposited into the auditor's centennial account, renamed the document preservation and modernization account. The account must be used for copying, preserving, and indexing historical records in other county offices as well as the auditor's office, and is not added to the county current expense fund.

A local government document preservation and modernization committee is created within each county to prioritize the expenditure of funds, and to submit the prioritization to the county legislative authority for approval. The funds are prohibited from being used to supplant existing county operations. The committee is made up of the auditor, who is chair, the assessor, clerk, treasurer, and an appointee of the county legislative authority.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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

Testimony For: Auditors have the responsibility for maintaining public historical records, and to keep them safe. The auditors need technology to provide this function. The document recording fee has not been increased since 1985, and the document preservation fee hasn't increased since 1989. The national association of auditors did a national survey, and found that \$17 is the average nationwide for recording a document. This bill would bring Washington up to the national average. The records management function is strapped for funds.

The only way for smaller counties to get electronic systems is through this fund. Out of the Douglas County's Auditor budget, \$25,000 - \$30,000, they are unable to purchase needed equipment for other county offices to bring them into the electronic age. With budget cuts, and increasing mandates, keeping records is even more paramount. Real estate documents are the main driver of the department, and preservation is very

important. Grays Harbor has instituted a very successful program, but access to funding is necessary to access technology.

Section 3 - the committee that is created, Pierce County has experienced problems, and would recommend against that section.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Representative Dunshee; Bob Terwilliger, Snohomish County Auditor; Suzanne Sinclair, Island County Auditor; Thad Duvall, Douglas County Auditor; Vern Spatz, Grays Harbor County Auditor; and Rose Bowman, Lewis County Treasurer.

(Concerns) Pat McCarthy, Pierce County Chief Deputy; and Pam Daniels, Snohomish County Clerk.