

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6679

As of February 13, 2002

Title: An act relating to preserving essential government services in the event of catastrophic county revenue losses.

Brief Description: Preserving essential government services in the event of catastrophic county revenue losses.

Sponsors: Senators Deccio, Snyder, Morton, T. Sheldon, Sheahan, Hargrove, Rasmussen, Honeyford, McCaslin and Winsley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 2/11/02.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Staff: Steve Jones (786-7440)

Background: County governments are political subdivisions of the state and are created under the authority of the state Constitution. The powers and duties of county governments are established by state statute. These statutes specify the mandatory and discretionary programs and services provided by counties, as well as the sources of revenue available to county governments.

Summary of Bill: A county legislative authority may, by a 60 percent vote, declare a revenue emergency if:

1. County revenues are less than 90 percent of the average revenue for the previous two years;
2. The county is unable to provide specified required services (such as civil and criminal justice, juvenile services, public health programs, elections, and other services required by law) due to loss of state funds or a loss of local funds as a result of state action; and
3. The county is unable to meet its legal obligations without state assistance.

If the Governor concurs with the declaration of the county revenue emergency, the Governor may draw upon the unappropriated amount in the state treasury, and pay for the essential government services in that county.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: Small rural counties are facing a fiscal crises and will soon be unable to meet their constitutional and statutory obligation to provide criminal and civil justice functions, protect the public health, and administer essential public services. This bill establishes a legal mechanism to address these situations.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Senator Alex Deccio; Senator Bob Morton; Maureen Morris, Association of Washington Counties.