
State Government Committee

HB 1282

Brief Description: Creating the office of citizen councilor.

Sponsors: Representatives Haigh, Tom, Upthegrove, Jarrett, Murray, Ericksen, Hunter, Shabro and Anderson.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the office of Citizen Councilor and the citizen councilor network.

Hearing Date: 2/25/03

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

Background:

Some parties believe that citizen alienation from the political process can be alleviated if citizens are well-informed and are given a meaningful and convenient way to participate in political decisions beyond the traditional public hearing process.

Summary of Bill:

To increase public participation in the political process, the Legislature intends to establish and support a self-funding pilot process in cooperation with the State Auditor by which citizens can receive information about public issues and provide feedback to elected officials in a convenient, timely manner and local setting.

The Office of Citizen Councilor is created. Any citizen registered to vote, or who lives in Washington, who volunteers to act as an official government advisor may become a citizen councilor by contacting the State Auditor and subscribing to a nominal fee as set by the State Auditor. Citizen councilors must act collectively as official advisors or a sounding board for public officials and agencies. Conveners of citizen councilor groups are designated by the citizen councilor coordinator or deputy by the State Auditor.

The State Auditor must determine suggested issues for public discussion approximately quarterly. An advisory steering committee is created to help the State Auditor determine and assign issues to the volunteer Citizen Councilor Coordinator for implementation by value

reporters. After an orientation meeting, the Governor, Legislature, and State Auditor rotate issue determination. A process is established to determine public information materials for distribution to citizen councilors and the citizen councilor network. Value reporters assigned to gather information and issues must be as even handed as possible.

The offices of Citizen Councilor Coordinator (Coordinator) and Deputy Citizen Councilor Coordinator are created within the Office of the State Auditor and are appointed by the State Auditor with the advice of the steering committee. They serve without compensation, but are reimbursed for expenses. Some of their duties are to: (1) promote the citizen councilor program; (2) oversee preparation and dissemination of information; (3) hire a value reporter; (4) solicit volunteers; and (5) solicit individual citizen councilors to participate in local groups.

The Coordinator actively encourages citizen councilor groups to form throughout the state. The groups should consist of eight to 10 people. Each citizen councilor must be asked to make donations to cover costs.

A citizen councilor revolving fund is created within the State Treasury. The State Auditor may provide the Coordinator with space in existing offices and with clerical services. In the event the program does not support itself and terminates, any funds remaining must be deposited in the general fund.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.