

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1594

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 25, 2004

Title: An act relating to chief financial officers in charter counties.

Brief Description: Concerning the duties of a financial officer in a charter county.

Sponsors: House Committee on Local Government (originally sponsored by Senators Berkey, Haigh, Dunshee, Romero, Mielke, Benson, Ahern, Moeller, Wood, Alexander, Hinkle and Sullivan).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/25/04 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Stevens, Vice Chair; Berkey, Fairley, Horn and McCaslin.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Background: The state Constitution allows for two forms of county government in this state: 1) the commission form; and 2) the "home rule" charter form. The Constitution requires that all noncharter counties be governed by a board of county commissioners. A board of county commissioners shares administrative and some legislative functions with other independently elected county officials, including an auditor, clerk, treasurer, sheriff, assessor, and coroner. Other independently elected county officials and court officers include the county prosecuting attorney and the judges of the superior court.

Article XI, Section 4 of the Constitution was amended in 1948 to allow a county to adopt a "home rule" charter that frees a county from the constraints of the commission form and allows the voters to create their own form of county government, though subject to specified constitutional requirements. Within the limits prescribed by the Constitution, counties that adopt charters may appoint officers to perform the various governmental functions that are performed by elected officials in those counties that retain the commission form. Furthermore, a charter county is free to create titles and prescribe duties for county officers that are different from those required of counties that follow the commission form. Five counties have adopted home rule charters: Clallam, King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Whatcom.

In many charter counties, the duties traditionally associated with the county auditor are performed by an official designated as the "chief financial officer." In order to accommodate this difference in the titles used by the two types of counties, several state statutes relating to the powers and responsibilities of a county auditor refer to the "county auditor or the chief financial officer."

Summary of Bill: The parallel duties of county auditors and financial officers as ex officio deputy state auditors are clarified. The term "financial officer" applies to the holder of that office as designated in a charter county.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This bill clarifies roles and reinforces checks and balances in county government.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Brian Sonntag, State Auditor; Al Brotche, Mason County Auditor; Diana Housden, Klickitat County Auditor; Paul Parker, WA State Assn. of Counties.