

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5150

As Passed Senate, February 13, 2004

Title: An act relating to providing for the election of library trustees.

Brief Description: Providing for election of library trustees.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Benton, Roach and Stevens).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 1/29/03, 2/18/03 [DPS, DNP].
Passed Senate: 3/18/03, 27-22; 2/13/04, 25-23.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5150 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Stevens, Vice Chair; McCaslin and Reardon.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Kastama.

Staff: Diane Smith (786-7410)

Background: Public libraries may be established by cities, towns or counties or groups thereof, in the case of regional libraries. Public libraries may also be established by a variety of special purpose districts. All libraries are managed by a board of trustees of either five or seven members. The trustees are appointed by the legislative authority of the local governmental entity that established them. The trustees must submit an annual budget to the legislative authority so that the property tax levy that supports the public libraries may be levied. Trustees may only be removed by a vote of the legislative body.

Summary of Bill: An additional method to remove a trustee is made available to the voters. A library trustee may be removed by a vote of the voters in the district, city, town or county, as the case may be. The measure is placed on the ballot of the next election at least 60 days after a 10 percent petition is certified as sufficient by the county auditor.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: There is a public outcry about unresponsive library boards. The citizens are frustrated. There is no fiscal accountability under the current appointed board system. The salaries of library directors making \$116,000 per year shows the lack of fiscal

accountability. The cost of the election should not dictate the decision. The total lack of responsiveness by trustees is shown in their ignoring petitions and incidents in the library.

Testimony Against: The current system works. Adding another layer of voting is cumbersome, awkward, and expensive. The current system allows for balance of age and gender on the board. The bill would actually hurt library governance. Representation would favor populated areas. The budget process already is public and completely visible and the elected officials already do determine what money goes to the library.

Testified: Mark Nussy, Trustee, Everett Library (con); Larry O'Donnell, Trustee, Everett Library (con); Thelma Kruse, Timberland Regional Library (con); Amory Peck, Whatcom County Library District (con); Heidi Borton (pro); Edna J. Fund (pro); Gene W. Weaver (pro); Ken Bragg, (pro); Margaret Tweet, SAFE (pro).