

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6221

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government Operations & Accountability

Title: An act relating to use of public funds for political purposes.

Brief Description: Concerning use of public funds to finance campaigns for local office.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Franklin, Kline, Kastama, Keiser, Regala and Jacobsen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government Operations & Accountability: 2/22/06 [DPA].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)**

- Allows counties and cities to establish programs allowing the use of public funds for local office campaigns.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ACCOUNTABILITY

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Haigh, Chair; Green, Vice Chair; Hunt, McDermott and Miloscia.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Nixon, Ranking Minority Member; Clements, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Schindler and Sump.

Staff: Stephanie Toby (786-7106).

Background:

In November of 1992, Washington voters approved Initiative 134 (I-134), a measure that imposed limitations on campaign contributions and expenditures. Initiative 134 prohibited the use of public funds for financing political campaigns for state or local office. Before I-134 took effect, some local governments had programs allowing the use of public funds for campaigns for local office.

The Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) is charged with enforcing the campaign finance provisions of I-134. The PDC judges enforcement cases brought before them for hearing and possible penalty impositions.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The legislative authority of a city or county may establish a program allowing the use of public funds to finance political campaigns for local office. To do so, the legislative authority must adopt an ordinance or resolution, and gain public approval by means of referendum, of advisory ballot, or of the initiative process.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The ability to use the initiative process to gain public approval is added. Jurisdictions are able to choose which form to use to gain public approval. Thus, jurisdictions may choose to use the referendum form, advisory ballot form, or initiative process in order to gain public approval of the ordinance or resolution.

Appropriation: None.**Fiscal Note:** Available.**Effective Date of Amended Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.**Testimony For:** The Senate was only able to get an agreement to pass the bill if the language requiring a vote of the people was included. This bill restores the right of local jurisdictions to have programs that were already in place, had proven to be very useful, and had existed without any problems. Seattle was one of the jurisdictions that used such a program. A candidate had the option of using public financing mechanisms. If a candidate agreed to limit his or her expenditures, the candidate received a dollar for dollar match to the first \$50 from a contributor. This bill speaks to the goal of democracy by ensuring the widest participation.

Some prefer that the bill does not require a vote of the people. A referendum would delay implementation by one to two years, depending upon election cycles.

The substitute senate version only allows cities and counties to establish a program, and some wish that other local jurisdictions such as port districts could do so as well.

Testimony Against: People will not want their taxes being used for this purpose.

Public financing doesn't accomplish its stated goals. Using Maine as an example, campaigns did not become more competitive with the use of public financing. Most of the victorious publicly financed candidates were incumbents, not new candidates. Additionally, the participation of third party and minority candidates did not increase in Maine.

This bill does not allow voters to see who else supports a candidate's campaign. Instead of passing this bill, the Legislature should pass a bill that limits the amount of money that can be spent on a local campaign.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Franklin, prime sponsor; Lonnie Johns-Brown, League of Women Voters; David Foster, City of Seattle; John Creighton; and John King, Washington Public Campaign.

(Opposed) Rose Bowman, Lewis County Treasurer; Alex Bohler, Evergreen Freedom Foundation; and Rick Slunaker, Association of General Contractors.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.