

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6209

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As Reported By Senate Committee On:  
Water, Energy & Environment, January 26, 2006

**Title:** An act relating to utility charges.

**Brief Description:** Modifying utility charge provisions.

**Sponsors:** Senator Jacobsen.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Water, Energy & Environment: 1/18/06, 1/26/06 [DPS, DNP, w/oRec].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6209 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Poulsen, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Pridemore and Regala.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Delvin and Honeyford.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Mulliken.

**Staff:** Richard Rodger (786-7461)

**Background:** Cities and towns are authorized to provide utilities such as gas, electric, and water service. There are no statutory provisions regarding the information required to be submitted by an applicant for municipal utility services. The utilities regulated by the Utilities and Transportation Commission have regulations covering applicant information. It has been suggested that cities and towns should have a standardized process to avoid conflicts over which individuals are responsible for utility charges.

**Summary of Substitute Bill:** A city or town providing residential gas, electric, or water utility service may require the following information when a new applicant applies for the service after July 1, 2006: (1) The applicant's name, address, and telephone number, and an alternative contact telephone number, if applicable, of the responsible party at the service premises; (2) the date the service is requested to be effective; (3) the type equipment to be served at the service premises; (4) one source of identification chosen from a provided list; and (5) any additional information the city or town may reasonably require for billing or service.

When multiple tenants seek utility services each individual who will be responsible for the payment of services must submit a signed acknowledgment of that obligation, either in person or by mail, within 30 days of obtaining service. If the utility does not receive the signatures, it

can either terminate service or hold the individual tenant who applied for service liable for the utility bill.

The city or town may not refuse to provide service to an applicant or customer because there are outstanding amounts due from a prior customer, unless the applicant or customer is acting in cooperation with the prior customer with the intent to avoid payment.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:** The bill as referred to committee was not considered. The committee did hear a different proposed substitute at the public hearing. The bill as passed committee makes the applicant information permissive, rather than mandatory, and provides a new procedure for dealing with multiple tenants who are responsible for payment of the utility bill.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available on original bill.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

**Testimony For:** This bill deals with situations where multiple tenants live in a community setting. It ensures that tenants cannot be held liable for payment of utility charges without their knowledge and consent.

**Testimony Against (the original proposed substitute):** Most utility services are connected by a phone call. It will not be easy to get everyone into the utility's office to sign a contract and provide identification. The mandatory provisions will pose a significant cost that will be passed on to the ratepayers. These provisions may result in delay of construction projects, delay inspections, and cause more paperwork and time for builders.

**Who Testified:** PRO: Senator Ken Jacobsen, prime sponsor; Ben Curran, citizen.

OTHER: Victoria Lincoln, Association of Washington Cities; Rose Feliciano, City of Seattle; Trent Matson, Building Industry Association of Washington.