

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6365

As Passed Senate, February 13, 2006

Title: An act relating to fees for the weights and measures program.

Brief Description: Changing fees in the weights and measures program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Agriculture & Rural Economic Development (originally sponsored by Senators Rasmussen, Schoesler, Jacobsen, Fraser and Shin; by request of Department of Agriculture).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Rural Economic Development: 1/19/06, 1/24/06, 1/31/06 [DPS].

Passed Senate: 2/13/06, 38-9.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6365 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Rasmussen, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Schoesler, Ranking Minority Member; Delvin, Jacobsen and Morton.

Staff: Bob Lee (786-7404)

Background: The Weights and Measures Program regulates the use and accuracy of all commercial weighing and measuring devices in the state except in Seattle and Spokane. These include gas pumps, grocery store scales, truck scales, home heating oil truck meters, liquid gas meters, and taximeters. The program consists of device inspections, fuel quality monitoring, price verification inspections, package inspection, and investigation of complaints. This program is administered by the Department of Agriculture (Department).

Seattle and Spokane each have their own programs for their respective jurisdictions. Those programs include most, but not all, of the inspections conducted by the Department.

Device registration fees were established in 1995 as the mechanism to fund the administration of these programs. Prior to 1995, the cost was funded from the state general fund.

Summary of Bill: The registration fee for numerous devices and the license fees for weighers, weigh-masters, and service agents are increased (refer to bill).

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2006.

Testimony For: Since the Weights and Measures Program was changed to a fee supported program in 1995, the program has not had sufficient funds to meet the goal of inspection interval of once every two years. Consumers expect a higher inspection frequency than what the current fee structure can provide.

Testimony Against: An across the board fee increase of 150 percent is not acceptable, especially when the state general fund is in surplus. There is support for a sizable fee increase, but fees should better reflect the cost of service. Some fees that are not being increased haven't seen an increase since 1969 and should be increased along with the ones that have been proposed.

Who Testified: PRO: Mary Beth Lang and Jerry Buendal, Department of Agriculture; David Foster and Craig Leicy, City of Seattle.

CON: Greg Hanon, Western States Petroleum Association; Tim Hamilton, AUTO; Jan Gee, Washington Food Industry; Jane Dale, QFC; Shane Erickson, Safeway Stores; Charlie Brown, Washington Oil Marketers Association.

House Amendment(s): The same fee levels established in the Senate version are phased in over a two year period with half of the increase taking affect on July 1, 2006, and the remaining increase taking affect on July 1, 2007.

In addition to the status report to the Legislature on the program that is due on December 15, 2007, required in both House and Senate versions, the House amendment requires the Department to convene its weights and measures advisory committee on a quarterly basis to monitor the implementation of the act and to report to the appropriate committees by December 1, 2006.