

SENATE BILL REPORT

E2SSB 5278

As Passed Senate, February 13, 2008

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, Kastama, Kline, Spanel, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, McAuliffe, Regala, Pridemore, Poulsen, Fraser, Rasmussen and Rockefeller).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/01/07, 2/15/07 [DPS, DNP]; 1/17/08, 1/21/08 [DP2S, DNP].

Passed Senate: 2/13/08, 29-20.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 5278 be substituted therefor, and the second substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Fairley, Chair; Oemig, Vice Chair; Kline, McDermott and Pridemore.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Roach, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

Background: Initiative 134, passed by the voters in 1992, regulates political contributions and campaign expenditures, and prohibits the use of public funds to finance political campaigns for state or local offices. Prior to the passage of Initiative 134, some local governments had ordinances providing the availability of public funds for political campaigns for municipal offices.

Summary of Engrossed Second Substitute Bill: The prohibition against the use of public funds to finance political campaigns for local office is removed. Before a local government may adopt public funding, it must be submitted to the voters for approval or rejection. If a county, city, town, or district establishes a programs to publicly finance local political campaigns, only funds derived from local sources may be used to fund the program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Proposed Second Substitute (Heard in Committee): PRO: We support removing the ban on public funds for local elections. The bill would address the problem of persons with great wealth, or with wealthy friends, can run. We have segments of society that are voiceless and powerless. We should give the option of public financing to level the playing field. We urge the committee to drop the provision limiting this to cities only. Leave it as a choice for all local jurisdictions. We urge the committee to reject any requirement for a local referendum or an advisory ballot. Special interests often trumps the public will. A local choice local options bill is a good idea. Requiring a local referendum is an unnecessary financial burden on local jurisdictions. This bill is not a mandate, it simply provides the option for local governments to consider the use of public funds if they choose. There is a dramatic decline in the number of contributors to city council races in Seattle. Currently, there is slightly more than 7,000 contributors giving less than 100 dollars. This is a decline of nearly 4,000 contributors in nearly four years. The costs of races are increasing dramatically. It is very difficult for candidates to raise the necessary money. In many instances, candidates need to raise 250,000 dollars or more to be competitive.

OTHER: Opposed the bill last year. Opposed to the use of any public funds to finance campaigns. People should use grass roots efforts to go out into their communities and meet people and raise the money that way. We oppose any use of tax money to finance campaigns. If there is an amendment to limit this to cities and require a vote of the people we would be neutral on the bill.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Wayne Barnett, Seattle Ethics and Elections Committee; Craig Salins, Washington Public Campaigns; Barbara Settle, League of Women Voters; Blair Anundsen, Washington Public Interest Research Group.

OTHER: Christina Bridston, Washington Association of County Officials.