

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5419

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As of February 6, 2007

**Title:** An act relating to publication of a public hospital district's proposed annexation in a voters' pamphlet.

**Brief Description:** Requiring a public hospital district's proposed annexation to be published in a voters' pamphlet.

**Sponsors:** Senators Roach, Fairley, Eide, Carrell, Kauffman and Pflug.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Government Operations & Elections: 2/05/07.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

**Staff:** Amy Van Horn (786-7784)

**Background:** Public Hospital Districts: Public hospital districts own and operate hospitals and other health care facilities, and provide health care services to citizens. A district raises revenue by levying an annual tax on all taxable property inside the district. Annexation of new territory to a district must be approved at an election by a simple majority of voters in the territory to be annexed. Before an election on the annexation of new territory, the district's commissioners must hold a public hearing on the proposed annexation.

Local Voters' Pamphlet: Counties may produce local voters' pamphlets prior to elections. The counties must inform special taxing districts within the county that a voters' pamphlet will be produced. The pamphlets list the measures to be considered, and include arguments for and against the proposed measures. The pamphlets are mailed either to all residences or to all registered voters in the jurisdictions that have included information in the pamphlet.

**Summary of Bill:** Whenever a proposed annexation of territory to a public hospital district appears on an election ballot, the public hospital district must first distribute a local voters' pamphlet describing the proposed annexation to all voters in the district's current and proposed territory. Where possible, the district may include the required information in county voters' pamphlets, instead of publishing a separate voters' pamphlet solely for the public hospital district election. Whenever applicable, the format of the voters' pamphlets shall comply with the laws governing local voters' pamphlets.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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*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.*

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

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: King County Public Hospital District #1 operated a stealth campaign to almost double its size, and the affected citizens didn't know about the election at all. The community was notified by a newspaper reporter less than six weeks before the election, and the ballot title did not include the fact that there was a tax. The citizens were outraged, and 94.3 percent voted no for the annexation. It was really egregious. People need to know when there is going to be a vote on annexation. The law needs to require agencies to be open – you can't just ask the citizens to trust hospital districts now. What this bill requires is what's fair and what the people deserve. If cost of voters' pamphlets is a real problem, the districts shouldn't hold special elections.

CON: There are 55 public hospital districts in the state. The law governing them is over 50 years old, and this is the first problem we've had. Most districts are small rural hospitals, and it would cost from \$1,400 to just under \$20,000 to do a voters' pamphlet. There are other bills before the committee requiring public notice of agency action that would solve this problem.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Roach, prime sponsor; Alan Gamblin, Citizens Against Unfair Taxes; Anthony Hemstad, City of Maple Valley.

CON: Dick Goldsmith, Association of Washington Public Hospital Districts.