

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2750

As Passed House:
February 14, 2010

Title: An act relating to public utility districts and deferred compensation and supplemental savings plans.

Brief Description: Addressing public utility districts and deferred compensation and supplemental savings plans.

Sponsors: Representatives Sells, Crouse, Dunshee and Simpson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government & Housing: 1/20/10 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/14/10, 93-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes public utility districts to establish, maintain, and make contributions to a deferred compensation plan or a supplemental savings retirement plan for eligible district employees and officials.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT & HOUSING

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Simpson, Chair; Nelson, Vice Chair; Angel, Ranking Minority Member; DeBolt, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fagan, Miloscia, Short, Springer, Upthegrove, White and Williams.

Staff: Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

Public utility districts (PUDs) are authorized to distribute and generate electricity, provide water and sewer services, and provide wholesale telecommunications services. Most PUDs operate on a countywide basis and have jurisdictional boundaries that are coextensive with the applicable county, but PUDs may encompass a smaller jurisdiction.

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.

There are 28 operating PUDs in Washington. Twenty-three of the state's PUDs provide electrical services, while 19 provide water or wastewater services, and 13 provide wholesale broadband telecommunications services. Public utility districts are governed by a board of either three or five elected commissioners.

Statutes governing PUDs include specific provisions for employee benefits, insurance, and other employment issues. For example, a qualifying PUD whose employees or officials are not members of the state retirement system may contract for individual annuity contracts, retirement income policies, or group annuity contracts for the purpose of providing a retirement plan or paying all or part of the associated premiums.

Public utility districts are granted general authority to participate in the deferred compensation plan of the Department of Retirement Services, subject to federal and state requirements.

Summary of Bill:

Public utility districts engaged in the operation of electric or water utilities are granted express authority to establish, maintain, and make contributions to a deferred compensation plan or supplemental savings retirement plan for the benefit of eligible employees and officials. "Contributions," for purposes of this establishment authority, includes contributions on behalf of an eligible employee equal to the amount by which the employee agrees to a reduction in salary or wages, and also includes contributions made by the PUD separate from amounts otherwise intended as salary or wages. Employees who are covered under a deferred compensation plan or a supplemental savings plan of a PUD are eligible for simultaneous membership and participation in any pension system for public employees.

Provisions governing contributions to deferred compensation and supplemental savings retirement plans are specified. For example, contributions must be deposited in designated accounts, held in trust, or remitted to an insurer. Additionally, contributions may be deposited or invested in a credit union, savings and loan association, bank, mutual savings bank, purchase life insurance, shares of an investment company, or fixed or variable annuity contracts from any insurance or investment company licensed to contract business in Washington.

To the extent a deferred compensation or supplemental savings retirement plan is an individual account plan, a term defined in the legislation, participants in the plan may be permitted to self-direct the investment of assets allocated to their account through the selection of investment options authorized under the plan. An employee, official, or commissioner of the PUD, however, is not liable for any loss or deficiency resulting from participant investments.

Intent language specifying that the bill is intended to clarify the existing authority of PUDs to provide deferred compensation and supplemental savings retirement plans for employees, commissioners, and other officials is included.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Legislation adopted in 1941 that governs what PUDs may and may not do with regards to deferred compensation plans, has not been updated. This bill is an attempt to clarify deferred compensation provisions that apply to PUDs.

The Snohomish County PUD provides service to all of Snohomish County and Camano Island. This PUD offers supplemental savings plans to its approximately 1,000 employees. Although a variety of supplemental savings plans are authorized under federal law, PUDs rely on state law for the authority to issue deferred compensation plans. This bill is intended to fix a statutory gap that narrows supplemental savings plan authorizations for PUDs. This bill will allow equity investment options that are common in other supplemental savings plans and has no effect on the public employees' retirement system or the state.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Sells, prime sponsor; and Anne Spangler, Snohomish County Public Utility District.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.