

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5812

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, February 23, 2009

Title: An act relating to local health board composition.

Brief Description: Establishing the composition of a local health board in counties without a home rule charter.

Sponsors: Senators Marr and Brown.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 2/23/09 [DPS, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5812 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

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

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Roach, Ranking Minority Member.

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

Background: A health district consisting of one county may be created whenever the county legislative authority of the county must pass a resolution or ordinance to organize such a health district. The resolution or ordinance may specify the membership, representation on the district health board, or other matters relative to the formation or operation of the health district. The county legislative authority may appoint elected officials from cities and towns and persons other than elected officials as members to the health district board so long as persons other than elected officials do not constitute a majority.

A district board of health constitutes the local board of health for all the territory included in the health district, and must supersede and exercise all the powers to perform all the duties by law vested in the county board of health of any county included in the health district.

The Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) is one of 34 local public health agencies. The agency was originally established as the Spokane County Health District in January 1970,

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when the city of Spokane and Spokane County merged their health departments into one agency. In 1994 the Health District's official name was changed to the Spokane Regional Health District to reflect the increased scope of public health services and geographic coverage. Currently, the SRHD serves a population of more than 400,000.

Summary of Bill: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): The agency originally established as the Spokane County Health District (now known as the Spokane Regional Health District) is comprised of the following membership:

- two members of the Spokane County commissioners;
- one elected official from the largest city in the district;
- two local physicians nominated by the Spokane County medical society;
- a local health care professional chosen by the Spokane County commissioners;
- two local business representatives nominated by the local chamber of commerce, one representing the restaurant industry and one representing the building industry; and
- one public member chosen by the Spokane County commissioners.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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: This legislation is an attempt to address the concerns that impact 400,000 Spokane residents. This is a controversial bill and there is a political subtext to this issue. The regional public health issues have become very political in Spokane and the county has not had a chief public health officer for 2.5 years. The hope of this legislation is to bring more of a balance to the body of the health district. Perhaps removing political officials, the district can get back to the issues of public health before Spokane County faces a massive public health crisis. The bill is an attempt to fix a dysfunctional health system. The current board is dysfunctional and there needs to be a change in the composition. The current system doesn't work, it's time to try something new.

CON: The board in question makes no medical decisions but currently has three doctors on it. There is a \$24 million budget that the members need to be accountable for. The proposal before the committee creates less accountability, not more. There is an interim health director who is running the board. The question that needs to be asked is whether or not there is anything in the current organizational chart that is putting the public's health at risk? If the answer is yes, then there needs to be a solution beyond this bill. It is not responsible to put members on this board who do not have public accountability. This is not an advisory board, the members make decisions that impact public health.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Marr, prime sponsor; Courtney Clyde, M.D., Carl Nelson, Washington State Medical Society.

CON: Bill Gothmann, Spokane Regional Health District; Eric Johnson, Washington Association of Counties; Mike Burgess, Spokane County.