

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6285

As of February 1, 2010

Title: An act relating to campaign contribution limits for candidates for county office in a noncharter county.

Brief Description: Concerning campaign contribution limits for candidates for county office in a noncharter county.

Sponsors: Senators Sheldon and McDermott.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 1/21/10.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Staff: Edward Redmond (786-7471)

Background: In 1992 the Legislature passed the Fair Campaign Practices Act in response to the passage of Initiative 134. Initiative 134 imposed campaign contribution limits on elections for statewide and legislative office, further regulated independent expenditures, restricted the use of public funds for political purposes, and required public officials to report gifts received in excess of \$50. The stated purposes of the initiative were to: (1) give individuals and interest groups equal opportunities to influence elective and governmental processes; (2) reduce the influence of large organizational contributors; and (3) restore public trust in governmental institutions and the electoral process. In 2006 contribution limits were expanded to include elections for certain county and special purpose district offices and for judicial offices.

Contributions from an individual, a union or business, or a political action committee may not in the aggregate exceed \$800 per election to a candidate for state legislative office or county office, and may not in the aggregate exceed \$1,600 per election to a candidate for a public office in a special purpose district or a state office other than a state legislative office.

Limits also apply to political parties. State party central committees, minor party committees, and legislative caucus committees may contribute an aggregate of up to \$0.80 per registered voter in the candidate's jurisdiction for an election cycle. County central committees and legislative district committees may contribute an aggregate of up to \$0.40 per registered voter in the candidate's district. Contributions received from county central

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committees and legislative district committees combined may not exceed an amount more than \$0.40 times the number of registered voters in the jurisdiction from which the candidate is elected.

These dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation by the Public Disclosure Commission every even-numbered calendar year.

Summary of Bill: The list of public offices requiring campaign contribution limits is expanded to include county offices in a noncharter county. Noncharter county campaign contribution limits correlate with the statutory limits currently applied to legislative and county offices.

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: Campaign contribution limits have served the state well. Campaigns for most local offices, however, have not been subject to contribution limits. This has resulted in numerous instances where the contributions to local office campaigns have been many times higher than what is allowed for campaigns for state offices. An individual running for county commissioner, for example, received three to four contributions in the \$5,000 - 6,000 range and raised well over \$18,000 from about 16 contributors. The absence of limits on campaign contributions presents at least the potential for undue influence.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Sheldon, prime sponsor; John King, Washington Public Campaigns.