

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5381

As of January 17, 2012

Title: An act relating to adjusting voting requirements for emergency medical service levies.

Brief Description: Adjusting voting requirements for emergency medical service levies.

Sponsors: Senators Prentice and Regala.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations, Tribal Relations & Elections: 2/10/11, 1/16/12.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Staff: Sharon Swanson (786-7447)

Background: The Legislature has established rate maximums and aggregate rate maximums for the individual taxing districts that derive their funding from the regular property tax. The state property tax is limited to \$3.60 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The levies of the remaining taxing districts are generally divided into two types: senior taxing districts and junior taxing districts. Senior taxing districts are cities and counties. Junior taxing districts include library districts, fire protection districts, and port districts, among others.

If the combined rates of the senior and junior taxing districts exceed \$5.90 – the rates of the junior taxing districts are reduced first and then the rates of the senior districts are reduced, according to statutorily set priorities, until the combined rates fit within the \$5.90 limit. This process is referred to as prorationing.

The following levies are outside of the \$5.90 limit, but still subject to the 1 percent constitutional limit:

- voter approved emergency medical services (EMS) taxes;
- taxes to acquire conservation futures;
- voter approved taxes for affordable housing;
- voter approved metropolitan part district taxes;
- King County ferry district taxes for passenger-only ferries; and
- voter approved county criminal justice taxes.

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.

An emergency medical care and services levy (EMS levy) can be imposed for six years, ten years, or permanently. The EMS levy must be approved by a majority of at least three-fifths of the registered voters. The maximum rate of the levy is \$0.50 per \$1,000.

Summary of Bill (Proposed Substitute): A permanent EMS tax levy or the initial imposition of a six-year or ten-year EMS levy requires a three-fifths majority to pass. The continuation of a six or ten-year EMS levy requires approval of a majority of registered voters.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE (Proposed Substitute): The original bill changed the number of voters which must approve a six-year, ten-year, or permanent EMS levy from a majority of at least three-fifths of the registered voters to a majority. The substitute applies a majority vote to renewal of existing levies only.

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 bill was before the committee last session and did not make it to executive session. The bill has been modified by proponents to allow passage of EMS levy renewals by a simple majority. The, three-fifths, super majority requirement for original levies and permanent EMS levies remain the same. A levy renewal may get 55 or 56 percent of the vote but not pass. The district then is faced with the cost of another election which can cost anywhere from \$50 to \$100 thousand dollars each time. The changes in this bill are a good compromise to allow cost savings for the districts with fewer elections.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Mike Brown, WA Fire Chiefs; Kelly Fox, WA State Council of Fire Fighters; Ryan Spiller, WA Fire Commissioners.