

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 1013

As Passed House:
February 17, 2014

Title: An act relating to authorizing regular meetings of county legislative authorities to be held at alternate locations within the county.

Brief Description: Authorizing regular meetings of county legislative authorities to be held at alternate locations within the county.

Sponsors: Representatives Appleton, Seaquist, Ryu and Hansen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Local Government: 1/15/13, 1/24/13 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/9/13, 62-36.

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/17/14, 65-32.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Allows the county legislative authority to hold regular meetings at locations outside of the county seat when doing so would be in the interest of supporting greater citizen engagement in local government.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Takko, Chair; Kochmar, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fitzgibbon, Liias, Springer and Upthegrove.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Buys and Taylor.

Staff: Michaela Murdock (786-7289).

Background:

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.

Under current law, the county legislative authority for each county is required to hold regular meetings at the county seat. The county legislative authority is also permitted to hold special meetings at the county seat. Special meetings may take place outside of the county seat at any location within the county, if the agenda items for the special meeting are of unique interest to the citizens of the portion of the county in which the special meeting is to be held.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

An exception is added to the statutory requirement that the county legislative authority of each county hold regular meetings at the county seat to transact any business. Regular meetings may be held at alternate locations outside of the county seat if the county legislative authority determines that changing the location of the meeting would be in the interest of supporting greater citizen engagement in local government. However, this is an alternative option that may be exercised only on an infrequent and irregular basis.

At least 20 days before holding a regular meeting outside of the county seat, the county legislative authority must give notice. Notice must be: (1) posted on the county's website; (2) published in a newspaper of general circulation in the county; and (3) sent via electronic mail (e-mail) to residents of the county who have chosen to receive notice by e-mail.

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) The bill addresses an issue that was raised by a county in which the location of the county seat is some distance from other areas of the county. Great distance or travelling time between a county seat and remote areas of a county often prohibits citizens from participating fully in local government. Washington has geographically diverse counties and citizens, who live far from the county seat, do not always get to attend regular meetings of the county to have face-to-face contact with their representatives. There is a need and desire for easier access to local government. This bill will allow people who have not participated before to participate in local government, as well as allow other people to more fully participate in local government.

Under current law, counties are not able to take binding action at meetings held outside of the county seat. This bill will provide counties flexibility not only to hold meetings, but also to take binding action at locations outside of the county seat. Additionally, holding a special meeting outside of the county seat to invite input and participation from citizens, and then having to memorialize that input later is an inefficient use of local government time and resources.

Utilizing video-conferencing or telephone-conferencing to facilitate greater citizen engagement from outside of the county seat (in lieu of holding regular meetings at alternate

locations) is not a sufficient alternative to the proposed legislation. Nothing can replace a face-to-face meeting or opportunity to participate.

The bill will better balance the needs of all citizens to participate in local government, rather than only some parts of the county bearing the burden of disenfranchisement (due to distance, travel time, etc.), the burden will be more equally shared.

There will not be any fiscal impact for the state, and any impact at the local level will be de minimis.

(In support with amendment(s)) The bill ought to be amended to include a notice provision. The statute should explicitly require counties to provide sufficient notice of when and where regular meetings will be held and when binding action will be taken, so that all interested parties have an opportunity to attend the meetings.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Appleton, prime sponsor; Robert Gelder, Kitsap County; and Brian Enslow, Washington State Association of Counties.

(In support with amendment(s)) Rowland Thompson, Allied Daily Newspapers.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.