

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5872

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As of June 11, 2013

**Title:** An act relating to state government.

**Brief Description:** Relating to state government.

**Sponsors:** Senator Hill.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Ways & Means: 6/10/13, 6/11/13 [DPF].

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Staff:** Juliana Roe (786-7438)

**Background:** In 1981 Initiative 402 repealed the state inheritance tax and replaced it with an estate tax equal to the amount allowed under federal law as a credit against the federal estate tax. This is commonly referred to as a "pick-up" tax. A pick-up tax is not an additional tax on the estate but merely shifts revenues from the federal government to the state. Federal law phased out state pick-up taxes (i.e. federal sharing), with a complete termination in 2005.

On February 3, 2005, the state Supreme Court invalidated Washington's estate tax by holding that Washington's "pick-up" tax was based on current federal law, which had ended statesharing, and Washington law did not impose an independently operating Washington estate tax. Until the Legislature expressly created a stand-alone tax, the tax remained a pick-up tax that must be fully reimbursed by the federal credit.

In response to the state Supreme Court decision, Washington created a stand-alone estate tax in 2005. The tax took effect May 17, 2005. The current Washington estate tax is imposed on every transfer of property located in Washington at the time of death of the owner. The term "property" includes real estate and other property located in this state, as well as intangible assets owned by a Washington resident, regardless of location.

The measure of the tax is based on the taxable estate as determined under federal law, as it existed on January 1, 2005. For Washington decedents dying on or after January 1, 2006, a deduction of \$2 million is allowed from the taxable estate. The value of property used for qualifying farming purposes is also deductible.

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After subtracting any applicable deductions (e.g., the \$2 million statutory deduction and the value of qualifying farm property), the remaining Washington taxable estate is subject to a graduated rate schedule ranging from 10 to 19 percent.

As previously mentioned, the federal taxable estate is the starting point for determining Washington's estate tax. Federal law allows an unlimited marital deduction for property passed outright to a surviving spouse. Federal law also allows certain transfers of property to marital trusts to qualify for the unlimited marital deduction even though the surviving spouse does not have total control of the property. This property is referred to as qualified terminable interest property (QTIP). The QTIP is included in the federal taxable estate of the surviving spouse upon the surviving spouse's passing. Under both federal and state law, the personal representative of the first spouse to die can make a QTIP election to qualify the property for the marital deduction. Since the current Washington estate tax did not take effect until May 17, 2005, an issue arises as to whether the Washington estate tax applies to QTIP when the first spouse passed away prior to May 17, 2005.

On October 18, 2012, the state Supreme Court held in *In re Estate of Bracken*, 175 Wn.2d 549, 290 P.3d 99 (2012), that QTIP included in the federal taxable estate where the federal QTIP election was made prior to May 17, 2005, is not subject to Washington estate tax when the surviving spouse passes away after May 17, 2005. The Court reasoned that Washington's estate tax is specifically triggered by the transfer of property of the decedent and with QTIP, the actual transfer occurs when the first spouse passes away. The surviving spouse is an income beneficiary of QTIP, but upon the surviving spouse's death, no actual transfer occurs. Under federal law, a fictional transfer of QTIP occurs when the second spouse dies based on the original QTIP election by the first spouse. However, since the current Washington estate tax did not exist until May 17, 2005, no state QTIP election could have been made prior to this time.

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

**Summary of Bill (Proposed First Substitute):** The definition of "transfer" is amended to specifically include property where the decedent economically benefitted in the property, i.e., property in a QTIP marital trust. A commensurate change is made to the definition of the "Washington taxable estate" to specifically include an interest in QTIP, regardless of whether the decedent acquired the interest in the property prior to May 17, 2005.

The current applicable exclusion amount of \$2 million is increased by the most recent Seattle consumer price index, starting in 2014.

The current graduated rate schedule that is applied to the Washington taxable estate is increased from 10 to 19 percent to 10 to 20 percent.

The changes in the act apply prospectively as well as retroactively to decedents dying on or after May 17, 2005.

The changes in the act do not impact the parties involved in the *Bracken* decision.

The value of family owned business interests is deducted from the estate tax when acquired by a family member. An additional deduction cannot be taken for property allowed a deduction as farm property.

Family-owned business interests qualified for the deduction include an interest in a trade or business carried on as a proprietorship; an interest in a business entity if at least 50 percent is owned by the decedent and members of the decedent's family; or an interest in a business entity where 70 percent is owned by members of two families or 90 percent is owned by members of three families and at least 30 percent of the business is owned by the decedent and members of the decedent's family.

**Appropriation:** (1) \$15,822,000 to restore a portion of the Medicare subsidy for certain retired state employees; (2) \$10,074,000 in vendor rate increases for child care providers; (3) \$10,251,000 for the housing and essential needs program; (4) \$6,441,000 for funding an information technology project dealing with in-home care providers; (5) \$65,967,000 for allocation to state agencies by the Office of Financial Management to restore a portion of the funding reductions reflecting state agency administrative efficiencies; (6) \$13,000,000 for restoration of central service agency funding; (7) \$11,800,000 for a judicial information case management system funding for the courts; and (8) \$3,000,000 for restoring civil legal aid services.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.