

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1999

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government, Elections & Information Technology

Title: An act relating to elections in port districts that are coextensive with a county having a population of over one-half million.

Brief Description: Concerning elections in port districts that are coextensive with a county having a population of over one-half million.

Sponsors: Representatives Gregerson, Stokesbary, Ryu, Hudgins, Cody, Pollet, Santos, Senn, Springer, Fitzgibbon, McBride, Stanford, Kagi and Slatter.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government, Elections & Information Technology: 2/15/17, 2/17/17 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires that certain port districts be divided into commissioner districts that are the same as county legislative authority districts beginning in 2019.
- Makes this requirement applicable to any port district with five members that is coextensive with a county having a population of over 1.5 million and a legislative authority of nine members.
- Provides for a transition from five at-large positions to nine district positions, and requires that the commissioners receive the same salary as state legislators.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, ELECTIONS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; Volz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Gregerson, Irwin and Pellicciotti.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Koster, Ranking Minority Member; Kraft.

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.

Staff: Megan Palchak (786-7105).

Background:

Port districts are established in various counties of the state to acquire, construct, maintain, operate, develop, and regulate rail or motor vehicle transfer and terminal facilities, water transfer and terminal facilities, air transfer and terminal facilities or any combination transfer and terminal facilities and other commercial transportation, transfer, handling, storage and terminal facilities, and industrial improvements. Powers of the port district must be exercised within the district, through a port commission consisting of five members.

Summary of Bill:

Beginning in 2019 port districts must be divided into the same commissioner districts as the county legislative authority districts when the port district has five members and is coextensive with a county whose population is over 1.5 million.

Commissioners must reside in the district in which they are elected and receive the same salary as a member of the Washington Legislature. Commissioners elected prior to 2019, with at least two years remaining in his or her term, may complete his or her term in a new commissioner district. If districts are redrawn, and more than one incumbent commissioner resides in the same district, the commissioners determine "by lot" which will represent the district for the remainder of the term. Commissioner terms are specified. The county auditor must select district position terms.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

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 definition of a port authority is broad. In 1960 a pathway was established in law for a five-person commission. Comments were made to the Legislature regarding governance problems, lack of professional staff, and administrative problems. The cost of moving to nine commissions is one-tenth of 1 percent of the budget. Nine commission districts follows the charter established by the King County Council. Establishing five districts supports the appearance of gerrymandering. It is a simple mathematical adjustment to support proportional representation, and mirrors legislative representation. Ports need local representation to deal with battles over impacts at various levels and among communities. There is a need to move toward a commission that represents 235,000 rather than 2.1 million people. This bill supports transparency and increases accountability.

(Opposed) The majority of commissioners do not support this bill. Districting and commissioner election conversations have not taken place in maritime labor. There are concerns about preexisting pressure, balanced representation, equity, and barriers to employment and job protection. This bill favors Seattle, political uncertainty, and reduces representation. There is greater diversity within the port than within Seattle. Commissions serve not only their district, but the state as well.

(Other) The Northwest Seaport Alliance effectively generates revenue and supports jobs. Changing the governance model would create an imbalance within the alliance.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Gregerson, prime sponsor.

(Opposed) John Persak, Puget Sound District Council and International Longshore and Warehouse Union; Eric Johnson, Washington Public Ports Commission; and Tom Albro, Seattle Port Commission.

(Other) Sean Eagan, The Northwest Seaport Alliance.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.