

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2647

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

Title: An act relating to applying campaign contribution limits to candidates for all special purpose districts authorized to provide freight and passenger transfer and terminal facilities.

Brief Description: Applying campaign contribution limits to candidates for all special purpose districts authorized to provide freight and passenger transfer and terminal facilities.

Sponsors: Representatives Wylie, Stonier, Hudgins, Tarleton, Macri, Vick, Cody, Clibborn, Harris, Gregerson, Appleton, Fitzgibbon and Doglio.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government, Elections & Information Technology: 1/23/18, 1/24/18 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Makes campaign contribution limits apply to all port district offices regardless of the number of registered voters in that district.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, ELECTIONS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Hudgins, Chair; Dolan, Vice Chair; McDonald, Ranking Minority Member; Kraft, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Gregerson, Irwin, Johnson and Pellicciotti.

Staff: Desiree Omlie (786-7105).

Background:

The Fair Campaign Practices Act was enacted following passage of Initiative 134 (I-134) in 1992. The initiative limited campaign contributions, 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.

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.

Campaign contribution limits apply to candidates for: state office, legislative office, and certain local elected offices including county office, mayoral office, city council, school board office, judicial office, certain public hospital district boards of commissioners, and special purpose district offices if the district is authorized to provide freight and passenger transfer and terminal facilities and the district has over 200,000 registered voters. Special purpose district offices authorized to provide freight and passenger transfer and terminal facilities include port districts.

There are two port districts that have over 200,000 registered voters: Port of Seattle and Port of Tacoma. As of 2016, state parties and caucus political parties may contribute an aggregate of up to \$1.00 per registered voter to any one candidate for a port district. County central committees and legislative district committees combined may not contribute to any one candidate an amount more than \$0.50 per registered voter. Contribution limits imposed on an individual, a union or business, or a political action committee are an aggregate of \$2,000 per election to a candidate for a port district.

These limits are adjusted for inflation by the Public Disclosure Commission every two years.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Campaign contribution limits apply to all port district offices regardless of the number of registered voters in the district.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill:

- changes the reference to "special purpose district office for a district authorized to provide freight and passenger transfer and terminal facilities", to "port district office"; and
- adds a definition of "special purpose district" to mean port district.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 25, 2018.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill will require the same campaign finance rules to apply to all port districts. Ports are public entities and they are responsible to the public; there needs to be assurance that port districts are responding to constituents and not special interest groups.

Port districts make important decisions that affect the community deeply; unlimited contributions can damage communities. In a port district race last year in Vancouver, one side had \$594,000 contributed by one entity seeking a long-term lease with the port. When one entity that has a business relationship, and future business relationship, contributes that much money in a campaign, it is time to level the playing field. Port district races never used to be an issue, but that changed about 15 years ago. Two years ago port districts started to see large contributions; last year there was \$1 million spent on port district races—which is unheard of. There is no good reason to not subject smaller ports to the same limits. There needs to be alignment with other races, such as races for state legislative office.

There should be an amendment that says "port district" instead of "special purpose district authorized to provide freight and passenger transfer and terminal facilities."

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Wylie, prime sponsor; Eric Johnson, Washington Public Ports Association; Eric LaBrant, Port of Vancouver; and Don Orange.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.