
**State Government, Elections &
Information Technology Committee**

HB 2887

Brief Description: Addressing county commissioner elections.

Sponsors: Representatives Riccelli, Holy, Volz, Ormsby, Shea, McCaslin and Frame.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires noncharter counties with a population at or over 400,000 to conduct district-based elections for commissioner positions, beginning in 2022.
- Establishes a redistricting process to create a districting plan for the a qualifying county.

Hearing Date: 1/30/18

Staff: Sean Flynn (786-7124).

Background:

The state Constitution broadly sets out the form of county government in the state, including the establishment of county commissions as the governing body of the county. The Constitution also allows counties to adopt their own form of government by county charter. The Legislature may proscribe the election, terms of office, and duties of the non-charter county commissioners, as well as other county officials.

Under state law, noncharter county commissions are comprised of a three-member board, elected on a partisan basis to four-year staggered terms. Noncharter counties with populations over 300,000 may choose to increase the number of commissioners from three to five, if approved by the voters at a general election. Currently, only Spokane County fits within this category.

Each county is divided into districts to correspond with the number of commissioner positions. Each commissioner district must have approximately the same population. Candidates for each

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commissioner position are nominated in a district-based primary by voters from the district. Qualifying candidates from all districts then run in a countywide general election, with voters of the entire county electing the commissioners for each commissioner position.

The county commissioners may redistrict after each decennial federal census, in order to readjust the population equivalence of each district. The county commissioners must provide public notice and hold at least one public hearing one week before adopting any redistricting plan.

Summary of Bill:

Beginning in 2022, each noncharter county with a population at or over 400,000 must provide district-based general elections, where voters within each commission district elect the commissioner from their district. Any commissioner with over one-year left on his or her term by the end of 2022 election is subject to the new election. The initial term of the new commissioner positions must be staggered, in order to implement staggered terms.

To implement the new district election system, the qualifying county must establish a five-member redistricting committee by April 30, 2021, to adopt a districting plan for the county. The state legislators whose districts are wholly within the qualifying county may select four of the members of the committee, with such state legislator from each caucus of the House of Representatives and the Senate selecting one member of the committee, respectively. If by March 1, 2021, any of the four members have not been appointed, then the legislative leader of the caucus not making the selection may make the appointment.

The fifth member of the committee must be selected by a majority of the other four members. If the fifth member is not appointed by March 1, 2021, then the county board of commissioners must make the appointment. The fifth member serves as the nonvoting chair of the committee.

Members of the committee must be a registered voter and resident of the county, may not have lobbied or contracted with the county within two years, and may not have been appointed or elected as a legislative, county, or party official within the previous two years of appointment. Committee members may not engage in campaign activities while serving on the committee.

Within four months of formation, the committee must prepare and publish a draft districting plan, which divides the county into five commissioner districts. Each district must, as nearly as possible, be compact and contiguous, include natural communities and equal populations, and correspond with election precincts.

Within 60 days of publication, the committee may adopt the plan, after soliciting comments, holding at least one hearing, and amending the draft as needed. If the committee does not adopt a plan within 60 days, then it must submit the plan to the state Redistricting Commission (Commission) with instructions to approve a districting plan for the county. Upon receiving notice, the Commission must convene to approve a districting plan for the county within 60 days of receiving notice.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 29, 2018.

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