

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5752

As of February 16, 2017

Title: An act relating to conducting a study of the costs and funding sources for the core services and functions provided by county offices.

Brief Description: Conducting a study of the costs and funding sources for the core services and functions provided by county offices.

Sponsors: Senator Rivers.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Local Government: 2/14/17.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires a study to determine the cost per county resident to provide the core services of county offices, and the funding sources for all funds used to provide these services.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Staff: Alex Fairfortune (786-7416)

Background: Counties. Counties are the basic regional governments in Washington State, and fulfill roles both as political subdivisions of the state and as separate municipal corporations. Washington has 39 counties that range in size from 2200 people to over 2 million people. Counties implement state policies and act as agents of the state for a number of functions, including prosecuting crimes, assessing and collecting property taxes, and conducting elections.

Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC). JLARC is a joint committee consisting of eight senators and eight representatives that conducts performance audits, program evaluations, sunset reviews, and other analyses. Assignments to conduct studies are made by the Legislature and the committee itself.

Summary of Bill: JLARC must conduct a study to determine the cost per county resident to provide the core services and functions of the main county offices, including the assessor,

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auditor, clerk, coroner, treasurer, sheriff, courts, prosecuting attorney, and county legislative authority.

The study must also determine the funding sources for all funds used by the county offices to provide these core services and functions. JLARC must issue a report to the Legislature by November 1, 2017.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Before counties ask the state for any additional funding they need to make sure that the services counties provide are delivered in the most efficient manner and serve the citizens to the highest standards. The purpose of the bill is to give senators, representatives, and citizens the information to understand the cost to provide county services and the knowledge to make choices. The Legislature mandates laws that all counties must carry out. The challenge for counties in carrying out these laws is due to many factors including their capabilities and resources due to population, land size, location, and whether they are urban or rural. It is time, after 128 years, to systemically look at how the state is structured to deliver services to its citizens. However, that discussion must be data driven and not emotionally driven.

OTHER: The state has done 30 years of studies on problems with county finances, both costs and revenues. If this committee does additional studies, those studies should not be used as an excuse to postpone action. The way the bill is written, it drives the questions internally to our counties, relative to each other, about controlling their costs. The question needs to look at the cost drivers—risk pool, pension contribution rates, health care costs—which are outside county control. The Legislature should also be studying unfunded mandates. There should also be a comparison of local governments in general, including revenue authority, requirements, and responsibilities. The Legislature needs to look to see if local governments are dividing the existing pie up equitably to get the work done that the state is asking them to do.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Peter Van Nortwick, Clark County Assessor; Doug Lasher, Clark County Treasurer.

OTHER: Josh Weiss, Washington State Association of Counties.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.