

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 5496

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Title: An act relating to modification of precinct and district boundary lines.

Brief Description: Concerning modification of precinct and district boundary lines.

Sponsors: Senators Zeiger and Hunt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 3/26/19, 4/2/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Modifies criteria for establishing precinct boundaries, including a requirement that precincts must be either wholly within or wholly outside of a city or town.
- Modifies the process for changing precinct boundaries, including a process by which the county auditor may propose boundary adjustments to the county legislative authority that become effective if not formally rejected.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Gregerson, Chair; Pellicciotti, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Goehner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Dolan, Hudgins, Mosbrucker and Smith.

Staff: Jason Zolle (786-7124).

Background:

Washington counties are divided into precincts for purposes of elections administration. Precinct boundaries are established by the legislative authority of a county using the following criteria:

- Each precinct may have a maximum of 1,500 active registered voters, unless the county authority establishes a lower maximum limit by ordinance.

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.

- Each precinct must be wholly within a single congressional, state legislative, and county legislative district.
- If applicable, each precinct must be wholly within a single city.
- Precincts must be composed, as nearly as practicable, of contiguous and compact areas.

Each precinct is given a number for the purpose of precinct maps, which are public records.

Precinct boundaries may be altered at any time up until 14 days before the filing period for a primary election begins (unless a city or town annexes unincorporated territory, in which case precincts must be temporarily adjusted). Changes to precinct boundaries must follow visible, physical features on United States Census Bureau maps, unless the change is necessitated by annexation or incorporation or if following such features would substantially impair election administration. Changes that do not follow visible physical features must be accompanied by a statement from the county auditor indicating the applicable exception and the reason for it.

Each precinct may elect a precinct committee officer (PCO) for each party. A PCO is a member of the party's County Central Committee, which nominates people or fills vacancies for certain offices and elects members for the State Central Committee. The PCOs participate in party activities and represent the party at the precinct level.

Summary of Bill:

Criteria for Establishing Precinct Boundaries.

Precincts must be either wholly within a single city or town, or wholly outside of any city or town. If applicable, a precinct must be wholly within a single city or town council district or ward. Precinct boundaries must preferentially follow visible, physical features, as well as local jurisdictional and electoral district boundaries. Precinct boundaries need not be contiguous and compact in the case of:

- an unincorporated area entirely surrounded by incorporated territory; or
- incorporated areas that are geographically separated from the remainder of the city or town of which they are a part.

County legislative districts are no longer explicitly permitted to pass an ordinance setting a maximum number of active registered voters per precinct lower than 1,500.

The Process for Changing Precinct Boundaries.

County auditors may propose adjustments to precinct divisions or boundaries to the county legislative authority at least 52 days before the filing period for a primary election begins. The county legislative authority must hold a public hearing on the auditor's proposed changes within 45 days. If the county legislative authority does not formally reject the proposed changes within 45 days, the changes are adopted.

Changes to precinct boundaries may be made at any time up until seven, rather than 14, days before the filing period for a primary election begins.

Changes to precinct boundaries are no longer required to follow visible, physical features on United States Census Bureau maps (however, as discussed above, all precinct boundaries must preferentially follow visible, physical features).

County auditors are no longer required to send new precinct boundary maps to city or town clerks after boundaries are changed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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) This bill is supported by county auditors. It provides more certainty to the process for drawing and redrawing precinct lines. In practice, it is currently unclear about what an auditor's responsibility is relative to the county commission or council. This bill allows auditors to make a recommendation that is then heard in public. It also shifts the focus in drawing lines away from physical features, and it allows the county to lump together a few unincorporated "island" parcels that are not contiguous. Allowing an extra week to approve precinct boundary changes before an election helps auditors administer elections.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Zeiger, prime sponsor; Paddy McGuire, Mason County Auditor's Office; Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor's Office; and Julie Anderson, Washington State Association of County Auditors.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.