

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6415

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
Local Government, February 4, 2020

**Title:** An act relating to allowing a permanent fire protection district benefit charge with voter approval.

**Brief Description:** Allowing a permanent fire protection district benefit charge with voter approval.

**Sponsors:** Senators Das, Van De Wege, Wellman, Takko, Wilson, C., Hunt and Billig.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Local Government: 1/21/20, 2/04/20 [DPS].

**Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill**

- Authorizes a fire protection districts and regional fire protection service authorities to impose a ten-year benefit charge or a permanent benefit charge with voter approval.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6415 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Takko, Chair; Salomon, Vice Chair; Short, Ranking Member; Honeyford and Lovelett.

**Staff:** Greg Vogel (786-7413)

**Background:** Fire Districts. A fire protection district is a type of special purpose district created to provide fire prevention, fire suppression, and emergency medical services within a district's boundaries. Districts serve residents outside of cities or towns, except when cities and towns have been annexed into a district or when the district continues to provide service to a newly incorporated area.

Fire District Benefit Charges. A fire protection district may impose benefit charges on property within the district to finance its activities. Benefit charges may be imposed for a

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period up to six years if voters of the fire protection district approve a ballot proposition authorizing imposition of these benefit charges by at least a 60 percent majority vote.

A fire protection district may continue to impose benefit charges for another period up to six years, if approved by a simple majority vote. A district loses the authority to impose the third \$0.50 property tax levy if it imposes benefit charges, and the benefit charge may not generate more than 60 percent of the district's operating budget.

**Summary of Bill (First Substitute):** Fire protection districts and regional fire protection service authorities are authorized to impose a permanent benefit charge, when seeking authorization for the continued imposition of a benefit charge, with approval by at least 60 percent of the voters of the district or authority. Fire protection districts and regional fire protection service authorities are authorized to impose a ten-year benefit charge, when seeking authorization for the continued imposition of a benefit charge, with approval by a majority of the voters of the district or authority.

**EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE (First Substitute):**

- Allows a fire district to impose a continued fire district benefit charge for ten consecutive years upon majority approval of voters.
- Establishes a 60 percent voter approval requirement for the permanent fire district benefit charge.
- Allows a regional fire authority to impose a continued authority benefit charge for ten consecutive years upon majority approval of voters, or permanently upon approval by at least 60 percent of voters.

**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 on Original Bill:** *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: Fire districts are seeking consistent and stable funding to serve the public. The cost of elections for these reauthorizations can be quite expensive and districts believe this money would be better spent on fire and EMS services. This bill creates budget certainty and allows for long range planning.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Mona Das, Prime Sponsor; Bud Sizemore, Washington State Council of Fire Fighters; Dylan Doty, Washington Fire Chiefs.

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