

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SCR 8414

As Passed House - Amended:

February 27, 2024

Brief Description: Creating a joint select committee on civic health.

Sponsors: Senators Lovick, Torres, Billig, Boehnke, Cleveland, Conway, Dhingra, Frame, Holy, Hunt, Keiser, Kuderer, Lias, Lovelett, Muzzall, Nguyen, Nobles, Pedersen, Rivers, Saldaña, Shewmake, Stanford, Wagoner, Warnick, Wellman, Wilson, C. and Wilson, J.; by request of Lieutenant Governor.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/14/24, 2/21/24 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/27/24, 95-0.

Brief Summary of Concurrent Resolution (As Amended by House)

- Establishes the Joint Select Committee on Civic Health to build upon the work of the Project for Civic Health.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Ramos, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Cheney, Ranking Minority Member; Christian, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gregerson, Low and Mena.

Staff: Desiree Omli (786-7105).

Background:

In 2023 the Project for Civic Health (Project) was initiated by the Office of the Lieutenant

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Governor in partnership with the Henry M. Jackson Foundation, University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy and Governance, and the William D. Ruckelshaus Center. The partnership was formed on the shared premise of concern for the civic health of democracy. The initial stage of the Project involved convening community leaders, former and current elected officials, and youth in a series of roundtable discussions to discover the nature of the problem and its causes, as well as to solicit ideas to restore higher standards for respectful disagreement. The roundtable discussions were formalized into a report titled *Common Ground for the Common Good*, which includes a menu of potential solutions that were discussed, such as: creating training programs for candidates and elected leaders on respectful dialogue; celebrating, promoting, and rewarding bipartisan collaboration; bolstering credible local news media; creating more robust civic education for youth and adults; finding ways to preserve the benefits of social media while diminishing its harms; working on unifying civic projects; and building media literacy.

The roundtable report was to serve as a foundation for discussions at the Civic Health Project Summit, held on October 19, 2023. The purpose of the summit was to convene individuals from across the state to discuss the state of civic health in Washington and explore ways for sustained action to improve civic health in the state.

Summary of Amended Concurrent Resolution:

The Joint Select Committee on Civic Health (CCH) is established to build upon the work of the Project for Civic Health. The CCH must issue its preliminary recommendations and report to the Legislature prior to the 2025 regular session. A final report, including final recommendations, is due prior to the 2026 regular session.

The CCH consists of 13 members:

- the Lieutenant Governor;
- three members of the majority party and three members of the minority party of the Senate, selected by the President of the Senate; and
- three members of the majority party and three members of the minority party of the House of Representatives, selected by the Speaker of the House.

The Lieutenant Governor serves as the Chair of the CCH with one member of the majority party and one member of the minority party from opposite chambers both serving as vice chairs. The Office of the Lieutenant Governor is responsible for expenses and hiring of additional staff for the CCH except that legislative members must be reimbursed in accordance with current law. The CCH is dissolved after the issuance of its final report.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: This bill takes effect upon enactment.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The last few years have been difficult for our democracy. Ninety-three percent of Americans feel that incivility is a serious problem. A statewide poll revealed that 89 percent of people in Washington are concerned about the future of democracy and 24 percent reported that they stopped speaking to friends or a family member because of politics. People do not have to hate each other because they disagree. This act is a result of a partnership formed to create the Project for Civic Health (Project). As part of the Project, there were seven working groups that met to discuss the shared deep concern for the state of civic health in America and the root cause for the current state of civic dysfunction. Several potential solutions were discussed which necessitates further legislative examination, such as improving training for elected officials, enhancing civic education, improving media literacy, and more.

Washington's Legislature is a good example of a body of elected officials who treat others with respect and lean into compromises or disagree respectfully when agreement cannot be reached. However, this is not the case nationwide. Washington is not immune from the continuing influences that are degrading discourse in America and its Legislature needs to be engaged in the work to find a solution in order to inoculate the state from bad influences.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator John Lovick, prime sponsor; and Denny Heck, Lieutenant Governor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.