SFA BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Fiscal Agency • Lansing, Michigan 48909 • (517) 373-5383

Senate Bill 876 (as reported with amendment)
Sponsor: Senator Harmon Cropsey
Committee: Local Government and Veterans

Date Completed: 10-3-88

RATIONALE

Public Act 261 of 1966, which provides for the apportionment of county boards of commissioners, requires that the term of each commissioner be concurrent with that of State representatives as specified in Article 4, Section 3 of the State Constitution. Thus, the term of office for a county commissioner is two years. Some people believe that a two-year term is becoming obsolete primarily because other county officials — such as treasurers and clerks — serve four-year terms, because a two-year term impedes continuity in the governing of counties, and because the cost of conducting a countywide election every two years is becoming a burden for many counties that are operating within limited budgets. Therefore, some people contend that the term for a county commissioner should be four years and run concurrently with the terms of office for State senators.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Public Act 261 of 1966 to provide that, if approved by a majority of the electors at the next statewide election, the term of each commissioner who was elected after December 31, 1988, would have to be concurrent with the terms of State senators, as specified in the State Constitution. The bill would take effect January 1, 1989.

MCL 46.410

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

ARGUMENTS

Supporting Argument

County government is one level of government that is close to the people it serves. Yet, inconsistencies in the terms of office among county officials have resulted in incongruity in the governing of counties. For example, county clerks and treasurers have four-year terms while commissioners have two-year terms. A four-year term for commissioners would bring equity and continuity to terms of office among all county officials. Furthermore, a two-year term often results in a constant turnover of commissioners. Thus, a person no sooner is elected commissioner and becomes familiar with the responsibilities of the office, then the commissioner faces re-election. This turnover can cause delays in a long-term program, such as a road project, that takes time to develop and receive approval from the county board before it can get under way. If a project happens to be approved at the time of an election, the project's implementation may have to be delayed until after the election and the new commissioners become familiar with it. Lastly, the cost of conducting an election every two years is expensive for many counties that have limited funds.

Opposing Argument

A two-year term of office can result in greater accountability of a county commissioner to the people he or she serves. A commissioner who knows that he or she must face the electorate every two years, is more likely to stay abreast of voter sentiment.

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