

Local Government Committee

BILL ANALYSIS HJR 4207

TITLE OF THE BILL: Easing formation of new counties.

WHAT THIS BILL DOES: *Alters the number of registered voters required to petition to create a new county.*

SPONSORS: Representatives Lambert and Linville

HEARING DATE: Thursday, February 18, 1999

FISCAL NOTE: None requested.

ANALYSIS PREPARED BY: Scott MacColl (786-7106)

BACKGROUND:

Article XI, section 3 of the state constitution establishes parameters by which a new county may be created. This procedure has been used by the Legislature to create five new counties since statehood, the last of which was created in 1911. Article XI, section 3 of the constitution states territory may not be stricken from another county unless a majority of the voters living in the area petition for the change. The definition of a voter used the last time a new county was created is a voter who voted in the last election. However, a 1998 Washington Supreme Court ruling clarified this definition to mean a registered voter, thereby interpreting the constitutional provision to require a majority of registered voters to sign a petition for the creation of a new county.

SUMMARY:

The number of voters required to petition for a new county under Article XI, section 3 of the state constitution is decreased from a majority to at least twenty-five percent of the registered voters living in the area.