

**SFA**

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Fiscal Agency

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Senate Bill 860 (as passed by the Senate)  
Sponsor: Senator Gilbert J. DiNello  
Committee: Local Government and Veterans

Date Completed: 8-27-90

**RATIONALE**

Some school districts have placed before voters millage proposals in which both a millage renewal and a millage increase have been combined into one ballot proposal. In these cases, voters have no choice but to cast their ballots either in favor of or against the total issue, even though they may wish to vote separately for each part of the proposal. Some people believe that school districts should be prohibited from presenting a combined millage, and, instead, should be required to have separate ballot proposals for millage renewals and increases.

**CONTENT**

The bill would amend the Michigan Election Law to require that the ballot for a "millage election" clearly identify the renewal and the new millage portions of the millage request and provide for a separate vote on each portion of the millage request. The bill specifies that these requirements would be in addition to all other requirements imposed by law for a millage election.

"Millage election" would mean an election at which the electors voted on both renewal of a previously authorized millage rate due to expire if not renewed and authorization for a new millage rate in addition to that already authorized or being renewed. The bill specifies that a previously authorized millage rate that had expired would be considered a new millage rate if voted on at a millage election.

Proposed MCL 168.643b

**FISCAL IMPACT**

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

**ARGUMENTS****Supporting Argument**

State education officials reportedly acknowledge that voters are rejecting millage hikes more frequently than they have in recent history. Of the millage renewal issues on the ballot in the June 1990 school elections, 95% passed while only 28.2% of the requests for additional millage gained approval, according to the State Board of Education. Of the combined issues, 62.8% passed. In light of these voter approval rates and in the belief that a combined issue has a better chance of passing, many school officials may be inclined to place on the ballot a combined millage issue, rather than separate renewal and increase issues, as a ploy to gain voter approval of a millage increase that otherwise may face voter disapproval if it stood alone. This tactic places voters at a disadvantage since they are not able to vote separately on each issue. Separation of millage issues would give voters a degree of clarity about what a school district is seeking in funding, which many voters facing combined millage questions now do not have. Furthermore, separation of the millage issues would provide voters with a greater choice on ballot proposals.

**Opposing Argument**

When a decline in enrollment reduces State aid and/or when operating costs exceed the increase in combined State aid and local revenue, local school districts often combine renewal and additional millage when the additional funds

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are needed to continue the same level of educational program that was provided in the previous year. Uninformed voters often don't realize that the additional millage is not for "extras" in the school program, but merely to maintain the program already being offered to students. Unfortunately, these voters may reject the proposed millage increase, not realizing that the effect will be to reduce programs for the schools. A millage that combines a millage renewal and increase often is more appropriate to present to voters if school officials are seeking adequate funds to maintain the current educational program in the school district.

#### **Opposing Argument**

The bill addresses only renewal millages that are due to expire. Millage renewals often are placed on the ballot a year or more before they expire. It is not clear how the bill would affect these millage elections.

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.