

Adding two commissioners plan criticized by DougCo, other counties



The Colorado State Capitol building. Photo by Eric Muhr on Unsplash

 *By Mike McKibbin / NewsBreak Denver / Dec. 21, 2022*

[DOUGLAS COUNTY, COLO.] — County officials, including the Douglas County Commissioners, took issue Tuesday with a proposal to require five county commissioners.

In a Zoom conference call hosted by Colorado Counties, Inc., state Rep.-elect Robert Marshall (D-Highlands Ranch) explained why he plans to introduce such a bill when the legislature convenes in January.

It would mandate that counties with more than 70,000 people have five commissioners instead of three. Douglas, Jefferson, Pueblo, Boulder, Larimer and Mesa counties would be affected. Marshall noted that others, such as Pitkin and Garfield counties, are close to the population limit and are interested parties.



Douglas County commissioners George Teal, Lora Thomas and Abe Laydon.
Photo by [Douglas County](#)

Douglas County commissioners' arguments spurred bill

Marshall said the idea for the bill grew out of a [nearly year-long public spat](#) that involved Douglas County commissioners Abe Laydon and George Teal criticizing their colleague, Lora Thomas. But Marshall said the issue applies statewide.

"Once someone has a majority, they're unlikely to give it up. That goes for Boulder County with the Democrats in control and Douglas County with the Republicans," he added.

Marshall also noted the bill stemmed in part because Highlands Ranch represents a minority of Douglas County on the commission.

"We're really a suburb of Denver but we're in Douglas County," he said. "The rest of Douglas County doesn't want to be a suburb of Denver and our interests are overridden every time" by Laydon and Teal.

Local elections touted as proper solution instead

Mesa County Commissioner Cody Davis called the bill "a bad approach."

"There's a remedy already in place," he said, referring to local elections.

Marshall said putting the issue before county voters usually fails because it involves politics, advertising and other election-cycle methods.

"I look at this as a good governance bill," he said. "When you have three people, it's easy for two people to freeze out a third but with five people, I think you have a much more fluid decision-making process."

Who pays for two more commissioners?

Marshall said that adding two commissioners could cost each county \$400,000, but an in-depth estimate by legislative staff is pending.

The Douglas County Commissioners [briefly discussed expanding](#) to five members earlier this year.

"What we need are good commissioners, not more politicians," Laydon said Tuesday. "And I don't think it's fair to ask each county to foot the bill for this."

Mesa County Commissioner Janet Rowland said her county is not "deBruced," so it doesn't have \$400,000 for two more commissioners.

She referred to the Taxpayers Bill of Rights process of getting voter approval to keep all revenue instead of issuing yearly taxpayer rebates. The name refers to the bill's author, Douglas Bruce.

Jefferson County Commissioner Andy Kerr, a former state lawmaker, said he supported the bill but was "very concerned about this being an unfunded mandate" by the state. Jefferson County has asked its voters to approve DeBrucing measures several times, but each was defeated.

"This would be a huge hit to our budget and an upcoming refund to taxpayers of \$20 million to \$30 million," Kerr added.

"I think you'd have far better government if you have five commissioners and it would be worth the cost," Marshall said. "And I'd be willing to drop the bill if there's fair representation across the board. Right now I don't think there is."

Marshall said he wanted to wait to name potential state Senate sponsors of the bill. He also planned to reach out to all 18 county commissioners in the affected counties for more input before the legislative session.