

THE TRUTH ABOUT HB212

A comprehensive explanation of what HB212 proposed, why I sponsored it, and what happened during the 2026 legislative session

Overview

HB212 was a relatively consensus bill during the 2026 legislative session. It moved through the legislative process without significant controversy and was intended to create a thoughtful, voter-driven process for considering the formation of a new county in very large counties.

Because the Senate vote occurred at the literal end of the session, however, it received some media coverage, and many people first heard about the bill after the session had already ended. That understandably led to questions from members of the public who had not been following the legislation closely. Since then, some political opponents have tried to use that lack of familiarity to spread misinformation about what the bill would have done.

Some have described HB212 as an effort by the Legislature to split Salt Lake County. Others have suggested that it would have bypassed local voters, doubled the cost of local government, or allowed a county division to occur without a careful review of the financial and practical consequences.

That is not what the bill did.

HB212 did not divide Salt Lake County. It did not draw a proposed boundary. It did not direct any city to leave the county. It did not allow the Legislature, a single small city, or a handful of elected officials to impose a county split.

Instead, HB212 created an alternative path for a county with more than one million residents to consider whether forming a new county might make sense. That process could begin only if a city, or multiple cities acting together, representing at least one-third of the county's population passed resolutions through their elected city councils proposing the creation of a new county.

That local action would not split the county. It would trigger a detailed feasibility study, followed by a vote of the people. Voters in both the proposed new county and the remaining county would need to approve the change.

My goal was not to force a predetermined outcome. My goal was to create a transparent, information-driven process that would allow voters to decide whether a different structure of local government could better serve their communities.

Why consider the issue at all?

Utah law already provides a path for residents to pursue the creation of a new county. But the existing citizen-petition process is extremely difficult to use in a county with more than one million people.

Under the existing process, residents must gather signatures from at least one-fourth of the voters in the county. If the petition requirements are met, the issue proceeds to the ballot.

That creates two practical concerns.

First, gathering that many signatures is an enormous hurdle in a county with more than one million residents.

Second, the existing process does not require a feasibility study before the issue goes to voters. Voters could be asked to decide a major question about taxes, services, debt, assets, and county responsibilities without first receiving a detailed independent analysis.

HB212 would have improved that process.

It preserved the existing citizen-petition route while adding an alternative path designed for very large counties. It also required an independent feasibility study before voters were asked to make a final decision.

Salt Lake County has grown significantly and now has more than one million residents. It includes large, mature cities with their own elected leaders, police departments, parks, public works operations, and other municipal services.

As these communities have grown, it is reasonable to ask whether our structure of local government is still as responsive and effective as it should be. In some areas, residents receive most of their day-to-day services from their city while also paying taxes to a county government that serves a much larger and increasingly diverse population. That can create questions about overlapping responsibilities, accountability, and whether decisions are being made close enough to the people they affect.

This is not an argument that Salt Lake County must be divided. It is an argument that voters should have a workable process to evaluate the issue for themselves.

The answer may be yes. It may be no. HB212 did not predetermine that answer. It created a careful process so the issue could be studied, the consequences could be understood, and voters could make the final decision themselves.

What process would HB212 have created?

HB212 would have created an alternative path for considering the formation of a new county in a county with more than one million residents.

It did not replace the existing citizen-petition process. It preserved that process while adding a more practical and informed option for very large counties.

The alternative process would have worked as follows:

1. Locally elected city councils would initiate the process

A city, or multiple cities acting together, representing at least one-third of the county's population could begin the process by passing resolutions through their elected city councils.

Those resolutions would need to identify the proposed name and boundaries of the new county. They would also need to explain how the proposed new county and the remaining county could continue providing essential county services in a cost-effective manner.

The proposed boundaries could not divide an existing city.

2. An independent feasibility study would examine the consequences

The city council resolutions would not create a new county. They would trigger an independent feasibility study.

That study would evaluate the practical and financial effects of the proposal, including:

- population and projected growth;
- demographics and the economic base;
- the cost of continuing county services;
- the potential effect on taxes;
- the assets needed by the proposed new county and the remaining county;
- debt and other financial obligations;
- the effect on the state; and
- other relevant financial and practical considerations.

The city or cities initiating the process would reimburse the county for the cost of the study.

The purpose was simple: voters should understand the likely consequences before being asked to make a decision.

3. Voters would make the final decision

The Legislature would not decide whether to create a new county. City councils would not make the final decision either.

The voters would decide.

The proposal would go before voters throughout the existing county at a general election. To pass, it would need majority approval from voters in both:

- the area proposed to become the new county; and
- the remaining portion of the existing county.

That dual-majority requirement is important. A group of cities could not simply vote to leave while imposing the consequences on everyone else. Both sides would need to agree.

What HB212 did not do

HB212 did not split Salt Lake County.

It did not draw a map or determine which cities would be included in a new county.

It did not allow the Legislature to impose a county division.

It did not allow one city or a small group of cities representing only a small portion of the county population to trigger the process.

It did not allow city councils to make the final decision.

It did not bypass voters.

It did not impose a tax increase or reduce services.

It did not allow a split to occur without a detailed review of taxes, services, assets, debt, and other financial consequences.

HB212 created a process for asking the question. It did not predetermine the answer.

Questions and Answers

Was HB212 an attempt by the Legislature to split Salt Lake County?

No.

HB212 did not split Salt Lake County, draw a proposed boundary, or determine which cities would belong in a new county. It did not require any city to participate.

The bill created an alternative process that local communities could use if they wanted to consider the issue. That process could begin only if a city, or multiple cities acting together, representing at least one-third of the county's population passed resolutions through their elected city councils.

Even then, the resolutions would only initiate a feasibility study. A new county could be created only after the proposal was studied and approved by voters in both the proposed new county and the remaining county.

Why was an alternative process needed when Utah law already allows a county to be divided?

The existing citizen-petition route may be workable in a smaller county. It becomes extremely difficult in a county with more than one million residents.

More importantly, the existing process does not require a feasibility study before the issue goes to voters.

HB212 improved the status quo. It preserved the existing citizen-petition path, but added a more practical alternative for very large counties and required an independent study before any vote occurred.

That is a more informed and responsible way to approach a major decision.

Could a small group of elected officials force a county split?

No.

City council resolutions would not create a new county. They would only begin the study process.

To initiate the alternative path, a city, or multiple cities acting together, would need to represent at least one-third of the county's population. Their elected city councils would need to pass substantially similar resolutions proposing the boundaries of a new county.

After the feasibility study, voters would make the final decision. The proposal could move forward only if it received majority support from voters in both the proposed new county and the remaining county.

Why allow city councils to initiate the process?

Cities are the level of government closest to most residents. They provide many of the services people interact with every day, including police, fire, roads, parks, and other municipal services.

If communities believe a different county structure may better serve their residents, their locally elected city councils should have a responsible way to raise the question.

But initiating a study is not the same thing as making the decision. Under HB212, city councils could begin the process. Voters would decide whether to complete it.

Would splitting the county double the cost of government?

Not necessarily.

A new county would need certain administrative functions. But that does not mean every cost would simply double.

When a county is divided, each county serves a smaller population and geographic area. Some costs may be divided between the two counties. Some services may require separate administrative structures. Other services may be delivered more efficiently or may already be provided primarily by cities. The old and new county could also choose to share services, like a county jail, keeping the costs the same to administer.

Further, the role of the county government and the services it provides should be determined by its residents. As is currently the case, Utah County or Davis County does not provide the same services that Salt Lake County provides. If the county were to split, the old and new county may determine to provide fewer or more services than currently provided. This could lead to a net decrease in costs if less services were provided or increase in costs if the county chose to provide more services. Either way, a smaller county would be closer to the people and likely more responsive in reflecting their desires in what the role of the county should be.

The actual effect would depend on the proposed boundaries, population, tax base, assets, debt, and service responsibilities.

That is exactly why HB212 required an independent feasibility study.

The study would evaluate the cost of providing services in both the proposed new county and the remaining county, including overhead. It would identify required assets, evaluate the potential effect on taxes, compare costs, and determine whether both counties could function effectively.

The study would not assume that splitting the county was a good idea. It would provide the information voters would need to determine whether the benefits justified the costs.

If a proposed split did not make financial or practical sense, the study would show that, and voters could reject it.

Could cities leave Salt Lake County and take the tax base with them, while leaving the remaining county with the costs?

That is an important concern, and HB212 was designed to require a serious examination of that question before any vote occurred.

The feasibility study would evaluate the economic base of both the proposed new county and the remaining county, the cost of continuing county services, the allocation of assets and debt, the potential effect on taxes, and other financial consequences.

The initiating resolutions would also need to explain how both counties could continue providing essential services in a cost-effective manner.

Most importantly, voters in the remaining county would need to approve the proposal. Cities could not simply leave and impose the financial consequences on everyone else. Any current bond obligations of the county would continue to be shared by area covering both counties.

Could HB212 increase taxes or reduce services?

HB212 did not impose a tax increase or reduce any service.

Whether a specific proposal would increase costs, reduce costs, improve services, or create unacceptable tradeoffs would depend on the proposed boundaries and the financial circumstances of both counties.

That is precisely why the bill required a feasibility study before voters were asked to decide. Voters should have reliable information about the likely effect on taxes, public safety, roads, libraries, parks, health services, debt, and other county responsibilities before making a decision.

Why did the bill apply only to counties with more than one million residents?

The bill addressed a practical problem that arises when a county becomes extremely large.

A process that may be workable in a smaller county becomes much more difficult when a county has more than one million residents, numerous mature cities, and a complex mix of municipal and county services.

Salt Lake County is currently the only county in Utah that meets that threshold. But the bill was written as a general policy that could apply to another county in the future as Utah continues to grow.

Were local governments left out of the process?

No.

I introduced the concept during the 2025 general session as HB533, but chose not to advance the bill at that time. Instead, I wanted to give the county, cities, and other stakeholders time to review the proposal and provide feedback.

Over the following months, I worked with Salt Lake County, the Utah League of Cities and Towns, and city leaders. I incorporated their feedback before introducing HB212 during the 2026 session.

The Salt Lake County Council ultimately took a neutral position on the bill.

The legislation also placed locally elected city councils at the beginning of the alternative process. A proposal could not move forward unless city councils representing at least one-third of the county's population chose to initiate it.

The purpose was not to impose a state solution. It was to create a local, voter-driven process.

Was HB212 controversial?

HB212 was not particularly controversial as it moved through the legislative process.

The bill received two public committee hearings: one in the House and one in the Senate. No member of the public testified in opposition during either hearing.

HB212 then passed the House overwhelmingly with bipartisan support by a vote of 56-10. It received a unanimous favorable recommendation from the Senate committee and later received a 17-12 majority vote in the Senate when it was reconsidered at the midnight deadline.

Reasonable people can still disagree about whether creating a new county would be a good idea. But HB212 did not split Salt Lake County or predetermine an outcome. It created a process for local elected officials to initiate a feasibility study and for voters to make the final decision.

The bill drew additional public attention after the session because of the unusual timing of the final Senate vote. Since then, some political opponents have tried to portray the bill as something far more controversial and far more sweeping than it actually was.

Was HB212 rushed through, hidden, or handled in a sneaky way?

No.

As is my common practice with more complicated legislation, I first introduced the concept during the 2025 general session as HB533. I chose not to advance the bill at that time because I wanted to give Salt Lake County, cities, and other stakeholders time to consider the proposal and provide feedback.

Over the following months, I worked on the bill and incorporated the feedback I received.

The revised bill was publicly numbered as HB212 on January 9, 2026. It then moved through the normal legislative process:

- It received a public hearing in the House Political Subdivisions Committee on February 12, 2026.
- It was debated on the House floor and passed the House on February 20, 2026.

- It received a second public hearing in the Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee on February 26, 2026.
- It was debated twice on the Senate floor before the final vote.

No member of the public testified in opposition during either public committee hearing.

The concept was publicly available for more than a year. HB212 itself was publicly available for nearly two months. It received two public hearings, debate on the House floor, and two debates on the Senate floor.

Reasonable people can still have questions or disagree with the policy. But it is simply not accurate to suggest that HB212 was hidden, rushed through, or handled in a sneaky way.

Why was the bill considered near midnight on the final night of the session?

That was simply a matter of timing.

Hundreds of bills move through the Legislature during the 45-day general session. Some bill will inevitably be among the last considered, and HB212 happened to be one of them.

The Senate first considered HB212 roughly an hour before midnight. During that debate, some rural senators raised questions about language they believed could affect rural counties. Those were fair questions. I met with them, explained the bill, and resolved their concerns.

The Senate then reconsidered the bill near the end of the session.

The late vote was not an effort to hide the bill or avoid public scrutiny. It was the result of senators taking additional time to ask questions, obtain clarification, and make sure they understood the legislation before voting.

Why did some people first hear about HB212 after the session ended?

Because the final Senate vote occurred as the constitutional deadline expired, the unusual timing drew additional attention after the session.

That understandably led to questions from people who had not been following the legislation closely. Since then, some political opponents have tried to use that lack of familiarity to spread misinformation about what HB212 would have done.

Those questions deserve clear answers. That is the purpose of this brief.

Did HB212 become law?

No.

The Senate considered HB212 near the end of the final night of the 2026 legislative session. Before midnight, the bill received more than 15 votes, the constitutional majority required for passage in the Senate. The Senate President initially announced that the bill had passed.

However, the voting process was not formally completed before the midnight deadline.

After reviewing the applicable rules during the enrolling process, Senate President Adams determined that HB212 had not passed within the constitutionally required timeframe.

As a result, HB212 did not become law.

Do you support splitting Salt Lake County?

I support giving voters a responsible process to evaluate the question and decide for themselves.

I am not committed to a predetermined boundary or outcome. Before anyone makes a decision, there should be a clear proposal, a rigorous feasibility study, reliable information about the effect on taxes and services, and a transparent public discussion.

If the facts show that creating a new county would improve local control, accountability, and responsiveness without creating unreasonable burdens, voters should be able to consider it.

If the facts show that a proposal would not work, voters should be able to reject it.

The point of HB212 was not to force an answer. It was to create a responsible way to ask the question.

Where I stand

I believe government generally works best when it is close to the people.

Local leaders are often best positioned to understand the needs of their communities. Residents should have a meaningful voice in how their local government is structured. And major decisions should be made transparently, with reliable information and voter approval.

I am not committed to splitting Salt Lake County. I am committed to having an honest conversation about whether our local government structure still works as well as it should for a county of this size, and to making sure voters have a responsible process if they ever conclude that a different structure would better serve their communities.

Any future proposal should continue to prioritize collaboration with local leaders, a rigorous feasibility review, clear information for the public, and a final decision by voters.

What this experience says about how I try to serve

I am not afraid to raise difficult questions.

Some issues are simple and popular. Others are complicated and politically sensitive. But those are often the issues that need serious attention. Public service requires more than avoiding controversy. It requires a willingness to look directly at difficult problems and try to solve them.

I try to approach those issues from a clear set of conservative principles: limited government, local control, taxpayer accountability, transparency, individual freedom, and respect for the people directly affected by government decisions.

But being conservative does not mean refusing to listen. I believe in working with people, including those who disagree with me. I believe in doing the hard work of engaging stakeholders, answering concerns, improving legislation, and looking for practical solutions.

HB212 reflects that approach. I introduced the concept, gave local governments time to consider it, incorporated feedback, moved the bill through the public legislative process, and supported a structure that would leave the ultimate decision with voters.

Voters should know what they can expect from me. I will take on tough issues. I will be guided by conservative principles. I will listen. I will work hard to get meaningful results. And I will remain focused on doing what I believe is right for our community and for Utah.

Review the bill and the public record

You do not have to rely on my summary. The full legislative record is publicly available.

On the Utah Legislature's website, you can read the complete text of HB212, watch the two public committee hearings, the House and Senate floor debates, and see the recorded votes for and against the bill.

<https://le.utah.gov/~2026/bills/static/HB0212.html>