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Bill that would provide fire service to county islands moves forward

Beth Lucas, Tribune

A bill that would force Gilbert and other municipalities to provide fire coverage to county islands moved forward Wednesday, and needs one final vote in the House and Senate before it is sent to the governor.

After receiving support from both bodies, the bill stalled in a committee of senators and representatives that had to make both of their versions of the bill identical. At issue was how much towns or cities could charge for fire service.

Rep. Bob Robson, R-Chandler, said the law is necessary to save lives of residents who don't want to annex into a city or town, but are currently without fire service.

The issue of fire service to county islanders has become controversial in Gilbert particularly. Some Gilbert residents don't want to offer fire service to islanders, but islanders argue that the town is trying to force them to annex into town to receive additional state revenues.

Rep. Tom Prezelski, D-Tucson, expressed concerns about the bill which he said still pinpoints specific areas in Maricopa County, including Gilbert.

"I've got some serious problems with this bill. The fact people are county island residents has not been addressed," he said. "Because of Maricopa County's complete lack of interest in governing, this doesn't mean they should be left off the book.

Mayor Steve Berman said the town will join other towns and cities to seek a veto of the bill. If the bill becomes law, the town will review its legal merits, he said.

If passed and considered of questionable merit, the town will sue to have the law set aside, as the town did with a previous fire service law, he said.