

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5151

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As Passed Senate, February 19, 1997

**Title:** An act relating to civil jurisdiction of district courts.

**Brief Description:** Adjusting the jurisdictional amount for district courts.

**Sponsors:** Senators Roach, Johnson, Heavey, McCaslin, Loveland, Snyder and Winsley.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Law & Justice: 1/23/97, 1/27/97 [DP].

Passed Senate, 2/19/97, 47-0.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Johnson, Vice Chair; Fairley, Goings, Haugen, Kline, Long, McCaslin, Stevens and Zarelli.

**Staff:** Lidia Mori (786-7755)

**Background:** All civil causes of action for monetary damages under \$35,000 must be submitted to arbitration prior to hearing by the court. The maximum arbitration limit in superior court is \$35,000 and the current jurisdiction level in district court is \$25,000, including actions upon bonds. Proponents of this bill believe if the jurisdiction limit of district court was the same as the arbitration limit in superior court, a litigant would have the alternative of pursuing his or her claim in either superior or district court.

It usually takes from one to two years to obtain a civil trial in superior court due to the heavy volume of cases. A trial can be obtained within six months in district court. There is support for raising the jurisdiction level of district court to provide litigants an option of pursuing their action in district court, provide a more expeditious resolution to their cases, and reduce the volume of cases handled by superior court.

**Summary of Bill:** The civil jurisdiction of district courts is \$35,000, except for actions upon bonds.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 22, 1997.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Testimony For:** This bill will provide people with another option. Those people with claims below \$35,000 will be able to choose between district and superior court. Hopefully, this will also affect the time it takes for a case to come to trial in superior court.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** PRO: Judge Steve Dwyer, Snohomish County District Court; Judge Mike Padden, Spokane County District Court.

**House Amendment(s):** The district court jurisdictional limit over civil actions upon bonds is raised from \$25,000 to \$35,000.