

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 5036

As Passed Senate, March 8, 1999

Title: An act relating to superior court judges.

Brief Description: Adding a judge to the superior court of Okanogan county.

Sponsors: Senators McCaslin and Heavey; by request of Board for Judicial Administration.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 1/15/99, 1/25/99 [DP].

Ways & Means: 2/10/99, 2/16/99 [DP].

Passed Senate, 3/8/99, 46-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Heavey, Chair; Kline, Vice Chair; Costa, Goings, Johnson, McCaslin, Roach, Thibaudeau, Zarelli.

Staff: Dick Armstrong (786-7460)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Loveland, Chair; Bauer, Vice Chair; Brown, Vice Chair; Fairley, Fraser, Honeyford, Kline, Kohl-Welles, Long, McDonald, Rasmussen, Rossi, B. Sheldon, Snyder, Spanel, Thibaudeau, West, Winsley and Zarelli.

Staff: Bryon Moore (786-7726)

Background: The Legislature sets by statute the number of superior court judges in each county. Periodically, the Office of the Administrator for the Courts (OAC) conducts a weighted caseload analysis to determine the need for additional judges in the various counties. The Legislature has authorized one judge for Okanogan County and two judges for Grant County. The caseload analysis by the OAC indicates a need for an additional judicial position in each of the two counties.

One-half of the salary and retirement benefits of a superior court judge are paid by the state. The other half of the judge's salary, half of retirement benefits, and all other costs associated with a judicial position, such as capital and support staff costs, are borne by the county.

New superior court positions are filled by gubernatorial appointment. The appointed judge must then stand for election at the next general election.

Summary of Bill: The number of superior court judges in Okanogan County is increased from one to two. The number of superior court judges in Grant County is increased from two to three. The new positions take effect only upon approval by the legislative authority in each county.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: The county has a significant need for a new judge. Counties with only one judge often have major workload and scheduling problems.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Justice Richard Guy, Supreme Court Justice; Judge Dan Berchauer, Thurston County Superior Court Judge; Jim Potts, Rural Counties; Chuck Foster, Office of the Administrator for the Courts.

House Amendment(s): The additional judicial position in Okanogan County is effective only if the county agrees to pay the expenses of existing judicial positions.