

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## ESB 5156

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Judiciary

**Title:** An act relating to superior court judges.

**Brief Description:** Creating an additional superior court position for the counties of Benton and Franklin jointly.

**Sponsors:** By Senators Hale and Hewitt; by request of Administrator for the Courts.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Judiciary: 3/20/01, 3/29/01 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill**

- Authorizes an additional superior court judge for Benton and Franklin counties jointly.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Carrell, Republican Co-Chair; Lantz, Democratic Co-Chair; Hurst, Democratic Vice Chair; Lambert, Republican Vice Chair; Boldt, Casada, Dickerson, Esser, Lovick and McDermott.

**Staff:** Katy Freeman (786-7386).

**Background:**

The Legislature sets by statute the number of superior court judges in each county. Benton and Franklin counties jointly have five superior court judges. Periodically, the Office of the Administrator for the Courts (OAC) conducts a weighted caseload study to determine the need for additional judicial positions in the various counties. The OAC indicates a need, as of the year 2000, for additional judicial positions in the counties.

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

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**Summary of Bill:**

The number of superior court judge positions in Benton and Franklin counties is increased from five to six. This new position becomes effective only if, prior to May 1, 2006, the legislative authorities of Benton and Franklin counties jointly approve the position and agree that the counties will pay their share of the cost of the position without reimbursement from the state.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not Requested.

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

**Testimony For:** By authorizing an additional judge, this bill will assist Benton and Franklin counties in managing their rising caseload. Benton and Franklin counties have not added a judge since 1980. The workload in the counties has gone up 75 percent, dramatically increasing between 1998 to the present. The January court filings this year are disturbing. If this trend continues, the counties will outpace the year 2000 by nearly 1,000 filings.

**Testimony Against:** None.

**Testified:** Senator Hale, prime sponsor; and Jeff Hall, superior court for Benton and Franklin counties.