

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 2471

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Judiciary, February 28, 2002

Title: An act relating to the methodology of determining the number of district court judges.

Brief Description: Changing the methodology of determining the number of district court judges.

Sponsors: Representatives Esser, Lantz and Casada; by request of Administrator for the Courts.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 2/26/02, 2/28/02 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Kline, Chair; Kastama, Vice Chair; Costa, Hargrove, Long, McCaslin, Roach, Thibaudeau and Zarelli.

Staff: Dick Armstrong (786-7460)

Background: The number of district court judges in each county is set by statute. Any change in the number of full or part-time judges in a county must be made by the Legislature after receiving a recommendation from the Supreme Court. The recommendation must be based on a weighted caseload analysis conducted by the Office of the Administrator for the Courts (OAC). The weighted caseload analysis must take into account a number of factors, including: the time that existing judges have available to hear cases; the judicial time needed to process various types of cases; and a determination of the amount of a judge's time that can be devoted exclusively to process cases.

Summary of Bill: The weighted caseload analysis used by the Supreme Court to make recommendations regarding a change in the number of district court judges in a county is changed to an "objective workload analysis." The objective workload analysis must take into account available judicial resources and the caseload activity of the court.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: (Pro original bill) This is an agency request bill which will provide counties and the Legislature with a more reliable mode, based on economics, to predict the number of district court judges needed in the county. It will provide an objective analysis.

(Pro striking amendment) King County only needs 23 judges based on an analysis of needs done at the local level. Given the budget problems at the county, the county should only have the number of judges it needs. Municipal courts are picking up some of the workload of the counties.

Testimony Against: (Striking amendment) The striking amendment, which sets the number of judges at 23 in King County, is based on budgetary concerns, not on workload. Also, we need to have an objective analysis of what is needed in a county. The weighed caseload analysis is acknowledged to be out-of-date. The Legislature should wait for more accurate information before setting a lower number for district court judges.

Testified: Representative Esser, prime sponsor (pro original bill); Judge Robert McBeth, King County District Court Judge (pro original bill, con striking amendment); Janet McLane, Administrative Office for the Courts (pro original bill); Judge Wesley St. Clair, King County District Court Judge (pro original bill, con striking amendment); Calvin Hoggard, King County Executive's Office (pro striking amendment).