

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESB 5156

As Passed Senate, March 6, 2001

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

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 1/23/01, 1/29/01 [DP].
Passed Senate: 3/6/01, 46-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass.

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

Staff: Dick Armstrong (786-7460)

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 five judges for the counties of Benton and Franklin jointly. The caseload analysis by the OAC indicates a need for an additional judicial position for 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 the counties of Benton and Franklin jointly is increased from five to six. The new positions take effect only upon approval prior to May 1, 2006 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 bill is straightforward and much needed. The counties desperately need another judge to keep up with the growing caseload. The workload over the past two years has increased tremendously. The caseload for civil cases has been increasing 20 percent-25 percent per year. The bill has the support of both counties.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Hale, prime sponsor; Judge Carolyn Brown, Superior Court Judge, Benton-Franklin Counties; Jeff Hall, Court Administrator, Benton-Franklin Counties.