

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5575

As Passed House:

March 2, 2022

Title: An act relating to adding additional superior court judges in Snohomish county.

Brief Description: Adding additional superior court judges in Snohomish county.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Law & Justice (originally sponsored by Senators Lovick, Robinson, Das, Lias, Nobles, Padden, Salomon, Stanford and Wellman; by request of Administrative Office of the Courts).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Civil Rights & Judiciary: 2/22/22, 2/23/22 [DP];

Appropriations: 2/25/22, 2/28/22 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/2/22, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates two additional Superior Court positions for Snohomish County.
- Requires the Snohomish County legislative authority to document approval and agreement to pay for the additional positions in order for them to become effective.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS & JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Hansen, Chair; Simmons, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Gilday, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Graham, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Abbarno, Davis, Entenman, Goodman, Kirby, Klippert, Orwall, Peterson, Thai, Valdez, Walen and Ybarra.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Matt Sterling (786-7289).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 33 members: Representatives Ormsby, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Gregerson, Vice Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Stokesbary, Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boehnke, Caldier, Chandler, Chopp, Cody, Dolan, Dye, Fitzgibbon, Frame, Hansen, Harris, Hoff, Jacobsen, Johnson, J., Lekanoff, Pollet, Rude, Ryu, Schmick, Senn, Springer, Steele, Stonier, Sullivan and Tharinger.

Staff: Yvonne Walker (786-7841).

Background:

The number of superior court judges in each county is set by statute. Any change in the number of full-time and part-time judges in a county's superior court is determined by the Legislature after receiving a recommendation from the Board for Judicial Administration (BJA). The BJA recommendation is based on an objective workload analysis developed annually by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The analysis considers available judicial resources and the caseload activity of the court.

Superior court judges and court commissioners hear felony and other criminal matters, civil matters, domestic relations matters, guardianship and probate matters, juvenile matters, and child dependency cases. Additionally, superior court judges hear appeals from lower courts and appeals from state administrative agencies.

The Washington Constitution provides that the state and county share the cost for superior court judges. A superior court judge's benefits and one-half of the salary are paid by the state while the county pays the other one-half of the judge's salary. For an additional judicial position to become effective, the legislative authority of the affected county must approve the position and agree to pay, out of county funds and without reimbursement from the state, expenses associated with the new position. Snohomish County has 15 Superior Court judges.

Summary of Bill:

Two additional judicial positions are created for Snohomish County, increasing the number of Superior Court judges from 15 to 17. The additional judicial positions are effective only if the Snohomish County legislative authority documents its approval of the positions and agrees to pay for the expenses of the additional positions without compensation from the state. The positions would then be created on July 1, 2022.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Civil Rights & Judiciary):

(In support) This bill provides much needed relief to Snohomish County. There is a need for additional judges because of a population increase of 15 percent and a caseload increase of 20 percent over the last five years. The county has not asked for an increase in the number of judges for the last 24 years.

(Opposed) None.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) There is an imminent need to increase the number of judges in Snohomish County Superior Court. There have been 15 judges in Snohomish County for the past 24 years. Since that time, the population in the county has nearly doubled in size. The jury trials have also grown over 67 percent during that time and have also become increasingly complex. The Snohomish County Superior Court is one of the few courts that has tried to stay open throughout the pandemic. If criminal cases are not heard in a timely manner, they can be dismissed for violating a person's right to a speedy trial. Snohomish County is ready to provide their share of the local match for the salaries of the new judges. This bill will provide the court with much needed support.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying (Civil Rights & Judiciary): Brittany Gregory, Administrative Office of the Courts; and Millie Judge, Snohomish County Superior Court.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): Millie Judge, Snohomish County Superior Court; and Brittany Gregory, Administrative Office of the Courts.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Civil Rights & Judiciary): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.