

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HJR 4226

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*As Reported By House Committee on:  
Judiciary*

**Brief Description:** Amending the Constitution to change the method of selecting the chief justice of the state supreme court.

**Sponsor(s):** Representatives Appelwick, Winsley, Vance, D. Sommers and Broback.

**Brief History:**

Reported by House Committee on:  
Judiciary, March 1, 1991, DP.

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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
JUDICIARY**

**Majority Report:** *Do pass.* Signed by 16 members: Representatives Appelwick, Chair; Ludwig, Vice Chair; Paris, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Belcher; Broback; Forner; Inslee; Locke; R. Meyers; Mielke; H. Myers; Riley; Scott; Tate; Vance; and Wineberry.

**Staff:** Bill Perry (786-7123).

**Background:** The chief justice of the state Supreme Court has substantial responsibility for the administration of the state's judicial system. The method of selecting the chief justice was established in the state's constitution at the time of statehood.

The chief justice is selected automatically based on which of the Supreme Court judges has the fewest years remaining on his or her term. Because judges are elected to staggered six-year terms, this process generally results in a different judge serving as chief justice every two years.

**Summary of Bill:** The constitution is amended to provide a new method of selecting the chief justice of the Supreme Court. The chief justice is to be chosen by a majority vote of the nine judges of the Supreme Court, and is to serve a four-year term.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** Upon approval by the voters at the next general election.

**Testimony For:** The current method of selecting a chief justice guarantees that most of the time the member of the court with the most administrative ability and interest will not be the chief justice. Two-year terms, with guaranteed turnover, provide inadequate time to implement significant administrative programs.

**Testimony Against:** Any request for a change in the method of selection should come from the court itself.

**Witnesses:** William Gates, Washington Commission on Trial Courts (in favor); and Tom Chambers, Washington State Bar Association (opposed).