

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5338

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE, FEBRUARY 15, 1991

Brief Description: Adding superior court judge positions.

SPONSORS: Senators Erwin, Vognild, Snyder, Owen, Nelson, Niemi and Roach; by request of Administrator for the Courts.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5338 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Nelson, Chairman; Thorsness, Vice Chairman; Erwin, Hayner, L. Kreidler, Madsen, Rasmussen, and A. Smith.

Staff: Dick Armstrong (786-7460)

Hearing Dates: February 7, 1991; February 15, 1991

BACKGROUND:

By statute, the state Legislature determines the number of superior court judges in each county. Currently, King County is authorized 46 judges, Snohomish County is authorized 11 judges, Grays Harbor County is authorized two judges, Skagit County is authorized two judges and Mason County is authorized one judge.

Periodically, the Office of the Administrator for the Courts conducts a "weighted caseload" study of the superior courts in the counties. The most recent study indicates that King County needs 63.19 superior court judges; Grays Harbor County needs 2.76 superior court judges; Snohomish County needs 16 superior court judges; Mason County needs 2.06 superior court judges; and Skagit County needs 3.34 superior court judges.

Retirement system benefits and one-half of the salary of the superior court judge are 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 borne by the county. A statute also requires that the county hire a court reporter for each superior court judge.

SUMMARY:

The numbers of superior court judges in four counties are increased as follows: in King County, the number of superior court judges is increased from 46 to 58; in Snohomish County, the number of superior court judges is increased from 11 to 12; in Grays Harbor County, the number of superior court judges is increased from two to three judges; and in Mason

County, the number of superior court judges is increased from one to two.

The 12 new positions in King County may be phased in by the county between July 1, 1991 and July 1, 1995. The new position in Grays Harbor County takes effect January 1, 1992; the new position in Snohomish County takes effect July 1, 1992; and the new position in Mason County takes effect July 1, 1991. In each county the positions become effective only if the county legislative authority documents its approval of the positions and agrees to pay the county's share of the cost of the new positions.

EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:

Skagit County is authorized one additional superior court judge and Snohomish County is authorized two additional superior court judge.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested January 30, 1991

Effective Date: Sections 1 and 4 take effect July 1, 1991; section 3 takes effect January 1, 1992; and section 2 takes effect July 1, 1992.

TESTIMONY FOR:

The additional judges are needed in the various counties to keep up with the increasing civil and criminal case workload. The study by the Administrator for the Court supports the need for the additional judicial positions.

TESTIMONY AGAINST: None

TESTIFIED: PRO: Senator Pat McMullen; Keith Wilson, Snohomish County Superior Court; Richard Thorpe, Judge, Snohomish County Superior Court; Pat Swartos, Mason County Clerk; Jim Sawyer, Mason County Superior Court; Anne Ellington, King County Court; Mike Gibson, Mason Co. Comm.; David Foscue, Grays Harbor Superior Court; Gil Mullen, Skagit County Superior Court