

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 1805

As Passed House:

March 11, 2003

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

Brief Description: Changing the number of district court judges.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Judiciary (originally sponsored by Representatives O'Brien, Nixon, Kagi, Tom, Sommers and Clibborn).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Judiciary: 2/20/03, 2/25/03 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/11/03, 91-1.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Reduces the number of district court judge positions in King County from 26 to 21.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Lantz, Chair; Moeller, Vice Chair; Carrell, Ranking Minority Member; McMahan, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Campbell, Flannigan, Kirby, Lovick and Newhouse.

Staff: Edie Adams (786-7180).

Background:

The number of district court judges in each county is set by statute. Any change in the number of judges in a county must be made by the Legislature after receiving a recommendation from the Supreme Court. The recommendation must be based on an objective workload analysis conducted by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The objective workload analysis takes into account available judicial resources and the caseload activity of the court.

King County has 26 statutorily authorized district court judge positions. The AOC conducted an objective workload analysis for King County District Court. In 2001 King County had 25.1 available judicial officers and the county has a projected need for 20.2 judicial officers in 2003.

The county must pay all costs associated with a district court judge position. The county may phase in a newly authorized judge position over a two-year period.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The number of statutorily authorized district court judges in King County is reduced from 26 to 21.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: This is the first time that we have grappled with the issue of reductions in judicial positions. The bill reduces the number of judges to 23 to allow for an intermediate, stepped approach to reductions. When judicial positions are increased, there is a stepped approach. King County has major budget shortfalls and has had to make major budget cuts. The objective workload analysis of the need for judges in King County shows a need of 20.2 judges. The number should actually be lowered to 21, especially in light of the potential future termination of contracts with municipalities, which will further reduce the need for judges in King County.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative O'Brien, prime sponsor; J. Wesley Saint Clair and Tricia Crozier, King County District Court; and Suzanne Dale Estey, King County Executive's Office.