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**SENATE BILL 6317**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2016 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Padden, Takko, Dammeier, Hargrove, and Hobbs

AN ACT Relating to the establishment of an office of superior courts; and adding a new chapter to Title 2 RCW.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that superior courts are constitutionally established to serve Washington's citizens by resolving legal disputes in domestic, civil, juvenile, and criminal cases.

(2) The legislature further finds that the effective administration of Washington's superior courts is an important component of the state's responsibility to fairly resolve domestic, civil, juvenile, and criminal justice cases.

(3) The legislature further finds that research is imperative to guide trial court reform efforts that improve equal access for Washington citizens, and that as Washington's population continues to grow and become more diverse, equal access to justice is in jeopardy.

(4) The legislature further finds that the cost of litigation has increased significantly, and superior courts require staff assistance to provide statewide development of policies that maintain access to justice for all citizens.

(5) It is the intent of the legislature to establish an office of superior courts that will:

(a) Utilize contemporary research to advance trial court services through policy, programs, services, and participation with justice stakeholders;

(b) Pursue improvements to family and juvenile justice by maximizing investment in juvenile court cases and promoting policies that equalize access to proven methods of service across the state;

(c) Respond to legislative efforts to improve court operations through program and budget development; and

(d) Utilize and develop research tools that promote programs leading to best practices that improve public safety in the criminal justice system.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) An oversight committee of the office of superior courts is created, consisting of the following five members:

(a) The president of the association of the superior court judges of the state of Washington;

(b) The incoming president of the association of the superior court judges of the state of Washington;

(c) The immediate past president of the association of the superior court judges of the state of Washington;

(d) The chair of the legislative committee of the association of the superior court judges of the state of Washington; and

(e) One member of the board of the association of the superior court judges of the state of Washington, appointed by the executive committee of the association.

(2) The appointed member of the association board serves a one-year term, and may not serve more than three consecutive terms.

(3) Members of the oversight committee receive no compensation for their services as members of the oversight committee, but may be reimbursed for travel and other expenses in accordance with rules adopted by the office of financial management.

(4) The oversight committee oversees the activities of the office of superior courts created by this chapter.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) A state office of superior courts is hereby created as an independent agency of the judicial branch.

(2) Activities of the office of superior courts are carried out by a director appointed by, and serving at the pleasure of, the oversight committee of the office of superior courts. The oversight committee shall determine the qualifications and salary for the director.

(3) The director shall:

(a) Respond to legislative requests to provide data to improve court operations through policy, program, and budget development;

(b) Evaluate and promote programs that lead to best practices to improve public safety in the criminal justice system;

(c) Pursue improvements to family and juvenile justice by maximizing investment in juvenile court cases and promoting policies that equalize access to proven methods of services across the state;

(d) Work collaboratively with the administrative office of the courts and other key stakeholders on implementation of statewide technology advancements allowing for data collection and outcome measurement;

(e) Report quarterly to the oversight committee established by section 2 of this act;

(f) Submit a biennial budget request;

(g) Conduct studies and complete activities related to the efficient and effective operation of the superior courts, as directed by the oversight committee;

(h) Employ staff, with the consent of the oversight committee, to complete the activities of the office; and

(i) Enter into contracts as necessary to implement and complete the operation, activities, and services of the office, where consistent with this chapter.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The office of superior courts shall work collaboratively with the supreme court, administrative office of the courts, and statewide county association to advance the efficient and effective operation of the superior courts in all 39 counties of the state.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  Sections 1 through 4 of this act constitute a new chapter in Title 2 RCW.

**--- END ---**