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**HOUSE BILL 1825**

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**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2022 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Dye, Orwall, and Graham; by request of Administrative Office of the Courts

AN ACT Relating to continuity of judicial operations in single judge courts; amending RCW 2.56.040, 2.08.120, 2.24.010, 3.34.150, 3.34.100, 3.34.130, 3.42.010, 3.50.075, and 3.50.090; adding a new section to chapter 2.56 RCW; and adding a new section to chapter 3.50 RCW.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 2.56 RCW to read as follows:

For purposes of this title and Title 3 RCW, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, "single judge court" means a court or judicial district that has only one judge.

**Sec.**  RCW 2.56.040 and 2005 c 182 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The chief justice shall consider all recommendations of the administrator for the assignment of judges, and, in the discretion of the chief justice, direct any judge whose calendar, in the judgment of the chief justice, will permit, to hold court ((~~in any county or district~~)) where need therefor exists, to the end that the courts ((~~of~~)) in this state shall function with maximum efficiency, and that the work of other courts shall be equitably distributed. It shall be the duty of every judge to obey such direction of the chief justice unless excused by the chief justice for sufficient cause.

(2)(a) If due to illness, incapacity, resignation, death, or other unavailability the presiding judge in a single judge court is unable to fulfill the duties of the office, and no person has been previously designated by the presiding judge to serve as presiding judge pro tempore, the chief justice may upon recommendation of the administrator for the courts appoint another judicial officer or other person who meets the qualifications of a judge pro tempore.

(b) After an appointment made under (a) of this subsection has been in effect for 30 days, the chief justice shall consult with the local legislative authority about the continued appointment during the remaining period of such illness, incapacity, or unavailability, or until a vacancy in the position is filled as provided by law.

(c) The chief justice may appoint someone other than the previously designated or appointed individual to serve as presiding judge pro tempore in the event of illness, incapacity, resignation, death, or unavailability of the presiding judge in a single judge court whenever the chief justice determines that the administration of justice would be better served by appointment of someone else to fulfill the presiding judge duties.

(d) After an appointment made under (c) of this subsection has been in effect for 30 days, the chief justice shall consult with the local legislative authority about the continued appointment during the remaining period of such illness, incapacity, or unavailability, or until a vacancy in the position is filled as provided by law.

(e) Nothing in this section is intended to modify the role of the commission on judicial conduct as provided in Article IV, section 31 of the Washington state Constitution and chapter 2.64 RCW.

**Sec.**  RCW 2.08.120 and 1955 c 38 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) If a vacancy occurs in the office of judge of the superior court, the governor shall appoint a person to hold the office until the election and qualification of a judge to fill the vacancy, which election shall be at the next succeeding general election, and the judge so elected shall hold office for the remainder of the unexpired term.

(2) During any vacancy that occurs pursuant to subsection (1) of this section in a single judge court, a presiding judge pro tempore who has been predesignated pursuant to court rule or appointed pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2) may fulfill presiding judge duties, and the authority of the predesignated or appointed presiding judge pro tempore endures until the chief justice appoints someone else to fulfill the presiding judge duties pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2)(c), or until a vacancy in the position is filled as provided by law, whichever occurs first.

**Sec.**  RCW 2.24.010 and 2021 c 311 s 17 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) There may be appointed in each county or judicial district, by the judges of the superior court having jurisdiction therein or a presiding judge pro tempore who is fulfilling presiding judge duties for a single judge court pursuant to RCW 2.08.120(2), one or more court commissioners for said county or judicial district. Each such commissioner shall be a citizen of the United States and shall hold the office during the pleasure of the judges making the appointment.

(2)(a) There may be appointed in counties with a population of more than four hundred thousand, by the presiding judge of the superior court having jurisdiction therein, one or more attorneys to act as criminal commissioners to assist the superior court in disposing of adult criminal cases. Such criminal commissioners shall have power, authority, and jurisdiction, concurrent with the superior court and the judges thereof, in adult criminal cases, to preside over arraignments, preliminary appearances, initial extradition hearings, and noncompliance proceedings pursuant to RCW 9.94A.6333 or 9.94B.040; accept pleas if authorized by local court rules; appoint counsel; make determinations of probable cause; set, amend, and review conditions of pretrial release; set bail; set trial and hearing dates; authorize continuances; accept waivers of the right to speedy trial; and authorize and issue search warrants and orders to intercept, monitor, or record wired or wireless telecommunications or for the installation of electronic taps or other devices to include, but not be limited to, vehicle global positioning system or other mobile tracking devices with all the powers conferred upon the judge of the superior court in such matters.

(b) Criminal commissioners shall also have the authority to conduct resentencing hearings and to vacate convictions related to *State v. Blake*, No. 96873-0 (Feb. 25, 2021). Criminal commissioners may be appointed for this purpose regardless of the population of the county served by the appointing court.

(c) The county legislative authority must approve the creation of criminal commissioner positions.

**Sec.**  RCW 3.34.150 and 1989 c 227 s 7 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) If a district has more than one judge, the supreme court may by rule provide for the manner of selection of one of the judges to serve as presiding judge and prescribe the presiding judge's duties. If a county has multiple districts or has one district with multiple electoral districts, the supreme court may by rule provide for the manner of selection of one of the judges to serve as presiding judge and prescribe the presiding judge's duties.

(2) Pursuant to court rule or RCW 2.56.040(2), a presiding judge pro tempore may be predesignated or appointed to fulfill presiding judge duties in case of the illness, incapacity, resignation, death, or unavailability of the presiding judge of a single judge court. In such circumstances, the authority of the predesignated or appointed presiding judge pro tempore endures until the chief justice appoints someone else to fulfill the presiding judge duties pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2)(c), or the period of such illness, incapacity, or unavailability ends, or until a vacancy in the position is filled as provided by law, whichever occurs first.

**Sec.**  RCW 3.34.100 and 2003 c 97 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) If a district judge dies, resigns, is convicted of a felony, ceases to reside in the district, fails to serve for any reason except temporary disability, or if his or her term of office is terminated in any other manner, the office shall be deemed vacant. The county legislative authority shall fill all vacancies by appointment and the judge thus appointed shall hold office until the next general election and until a successor is elected and qualified. However, if a vacancy in the office of district court judge occurs and the total number of district court judges remaining in the county is equal to or greater than the number of district court judges authorized in RCW 3.34.010 then the position shall remain vacant. District judges shall be granted sick leave in the same manner as other county employees. A district judge may receive when vacating office remuneration for unused accumulated leave and sick leave at a rate equal to one day's monetary compensation for each full day of accrued leave and one day's monetary compensation for each four full days of accrued sick leave, the total remuneration for leave and sick leave not to exceed the equivalent of thirty days' monetary compensation.

(2) During any vacancy that occurs pursuant to subsection (1) of this section in a single judge court, a presiding judge pro tempore who has been predesignated pursuant to court rule or appointed pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2) may fulfill presiding judge duties, and the authority of the predesignated or appointed presiding judge pro tempore endures until the chief justice appoints someone else to fulfill the presiding judge duties pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2)(c), or until a vacancy in the position is filled as provided by law, whichever occurs first.

**Sec.**  RCW 3.34.130 and 1996 c 16 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) ((~~Each~~)) In addition to the designation of a presiding judge pro tempore for a single judge court as provided in RCW 3.34.150(2), each district court shall designate one or more persons as judge pro tempore who shall serve during the temporary absence, disqualification, or incapacity of a district judge or to serve as an additional judge for excess caseload or special set cases. The qualifications of a judge pro tempore shall be the same as for a district judge, except that with respect to RCW 3.34.060(1), the person appointed need only be a registered voter of the state. A district that has a population of not more than ten thousand and that has no person available who meets the qualifications under RCW 3.34.060(2) (a) or (b), may appoint as a pro tempore judge a person who has taken and passed the qualifying examination for the office of district judge as is provided by rule of the supreme court. A judge pro tempore may sit in any district of the county for which he or she is appointed. A judge pro tempore shall be paid the salary authorized by the county legislative authority.

(2) For each day that a judge pro tempore serves in excess of thirty days during any calendar year, the annual salary of the district judge in whose place the judge pro tempore serves shall be reduced by an amount equal to one-two hundred fiftieth of such salary: PROVIDED, That each full time district judge shall have up to fifteen days annual leave without reduction for service on judicial commissions established by the legislature or the chief justice of the supreme court. No reduction in salary shall occur when a judge pro tempore serves:

(a) While a district judge is using sick leave granted in accordance with RCW 3.34.100;

(b) While a district court judge is disqualified from serving following the filing of an affidavit of prejudice;

(c) As an additional judge for excess case load or special set cases; or

(d) While a district judge is otherwise involved in administrative, educational, or judicial functions related to the performance of the judge's duties: PROVIDED, That the appointment of judge pro tempore authorized under subsection (2)(c) and (d) of this section is subject to an appropriation for this purpose by the county legislative authority.

(3) The legislature may appropriate money for the purpose of reimbursing counties for the salaries of judges pro tempore for certain days in excess of thirty worked per year that the judge pro tempore was required to work as the result of service by a judge on a commission as authorized under subsection (2) of this section. No later than September 1 of each year, each county treasurer shall certify to the administrator for the courts for the year ending the preceding June 30, the number of days in excess of thirty that any judge pro tempore was required to work as the result of service by a judge on a commission as authorized under subsection (2) of this section. Upon receipt of the certification, the administrator for the courts shall reimburse the county from money appropriated for that purpose.

**Sec.**  RCW 3.42.010 and 1984 c 258 s 30 are each amended to read as follows:

When so authorized by the districting plan, one or more district court commissioners may be appointed in any district by the judges of the district. Each commissioner shall be a registered voter of the county in which the district or a portion thereof is located, and shall hold office at the pleasure of the appointing judges. For purposes of this section, "appointing judge" includes a presiding judge pro tempore fulfilling presiding judge duties for a single judge court pursuant to RCW 3.34.100(2) or 3.34.150(2). Any person appointed as a commissioner authorized to hear or dispose of cases shall be a lawyer who is admitted to the practice of law in the state of Washington or who has passed the qualifying examination for lay judges as provided under RCW 3.34.060.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 3.50 RCW to read as follows:

During any vacancy that occurs in a single judge court pursuant to RCW 3.50.093 or 3.50.095, a presiding judge pro tempore who has been predesignated pursuant to court rule or appointed pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2) may fulfill presiding judge duties, and the authority of the predesignated or appointed presiding judge pro tempore endures until the chief justice appoints someone else to fulfill the presiding judge duties pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2)(c), or until a vacancy in the position is filled as provided by law, whichever occurs first.

**Sec.**  RCW 3.50.075 and 2019 c 52 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) One or more court commissioners may be appointed by a judge of the municipal court.

(2) Each commissioner holds office at the pleasure of the appointing judge.

(3) Except as provided in subsection (4) of this section, a commissioner has such power, authority, and jurisdiction in criminal and civil matters as the appointing judges possess, and must be a lawyer who is admitted to practice law in the state of Washington or a nonlawyer who has passed, by January 1, 2003, the qualifying examination for lay judges for courts of limited jurisdiction under RCW 3.34.060.

(4) On or after July 1, 2010, when serving as a commissioner, the commissioner does not have authority to preside over trials in criminal matters, or jury trials in civil matters unless agreed to on the record by all parties.

(5) A commissioner need not be a resident of the city or of the county in which the municipal court is created. When a court commissioner has not been appointed and the municipal court is presided over by a part-time appointed judge, the judge need not be a resident of the city or of the county in which the municipal court is created.

(6) For purposes of this section, "appointing judge" includes a presiding judge pro tempore fulfilling presiding judge duties for a single judge court pursuant to RCW 3.50.090(2).

**Sec.**  RCW 3.50.090 and 2000 c 55 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

((~~The~~)) (1) In addition to the designation of a presiding judge pro tempore for a single judge court as provided in RCW 3.50.090(2), the presiding municipal court judge may designate one or more persons as judges pro tem to serve in the absence or disability of the elected or duly appointed judges of the court, subsequent to the filing of an affidavit of prejudice, or in addition to the elected or duly appointed judges when the administration of justice and the accomplishment of the work of the court make it necessary. The qualifications of a judge pro tempore shall be the same as for judges as provided under RCW 3.50.040 except that a judge pro tempore need not be a resident of the city or county in which the municipal court is located. Judges pro tempore shall have all of the powers of the duly appointed or elected judges when serving as judges pro tempore of the court. Before entering on his or her duties, each judge pro tempore shall take, subscribe, and file an oath as is taken by a duly appointed or elected judge. Such pro tempore judges shall receive such compensation as shall be fixed by ordinance by the municipality in which the court is located and such compensation shall be paid by the municipality.

(2) If a presiding municipal court judge is the single judge of the court, then pursuant to court rule or RCW 2.56.040(2), a presiding judge pro tempore may be predesignated or appointed to fulfill presiding judge duties in case of the illness, incapacity, resignation, death, or unavailability of the presiding judge. In such circumstances, the authority of the predesignated or appointed presiding judge pro tempore endures until the chief justice appoints someone else to fulfill the presiding judge duties pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2)(c), or the period of such illness, incapacity, or unavailability ends, or until a vacancy in the position is filled as provided by law, whichever occurs first.

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