

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5003

As Passed Senate, January 25, 2023

Title: An act relating to increasing the number of district court judges in Snohomish county.

Brief Description: Increasing the number of district court judges in Snohomish county.

Sponsors: Senators Lovick, Robinson, Dhingra, Lias, Nobles, Stanford and Torres; by request of Administrative Office of the Courts.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Law & Justice: 1/10/23, 1/12/23 [DP].

Floor Activity: Passed Senate: 1/25/23, 49-0.

<p>Brief Summary of Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increases the number of district court judges in Snohomish County.
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SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Dhingra, Chair; Trudeau, Vice Chair; Padden, Ranking Member; Kuderer, McCune, Pedersen, Salomon, Torres, Valdez, Wagoner and Wilson, L.

Staff: Tim Ford (786-7423)

Background: District courts have jurisdiction over both criminal and civil cases. Criminal jurisdiction includes misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor cases that involve traffic or nontraffic offenses. Examples include driving while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs, reckless driving, driving with a suspended driver's license, and assault in the fourth degree. Preliminary hearings for felony cases are also within the jurisdiction of the district courts.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Jurisdiction in civil cases includes damages for injury to individuals or personal property and contract disputes in amounts up to \$100,000 exclusive of interest, costs, and attorney fees.

District courts also have jurisdiction over traffic and non-traffic infractions, defined as civil proceedings for which a monetary penalty, but no jail sentence, may be imposed. District courts have jurisdiction to issue domestic violence and antiharassment protection orders and no-contact orders. They also have jurisdiction to hear change-of-name petitions and certain lien foreclosures. Small claims are limited to money claims up to \$5,000. These are filed and heard in the Small Claims Department of the district court.

The number of district court judges in each county is set by statute. Any change in the number of full and part-time judges in a county's district court is determined by the Legislature after receiving a recommendation from the Board for Judicial Administration (BJA). BJA's recommendation is based on an objective workload analysis developed annually by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The objective workload analysis takes into account available judicial resources and the caseload activity of the court.

State law requires that in order for an additional judicial position to become effective, the legislative authority of the county must approve the position and agree to pay the expenses associated with the new position out of county funds and without reimbursement from the state. Snohomish County has eight elected district court judges. BJA recommends an increase in the number of district court judges by one position for Snohomish County.

Summary of Bill: The number of statutorily authorized district court judges in Snohomish County is increased from eight to nine.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The Cascade District Court has been very efficient for a long time, but it is very busy. Protection order filings and criminal cases were up in 2022. Law enforcement agencies are experiencing staff shortages, and once those are mitigated, those numbers will go up. There hasn't been a judge added to this court in 25 years and one is needed. This bill will help expand relicensing and mental health courts.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator John Lovick, Prime Sponsor; Jennifer Rancourt, Snohomish County District Court (Presiding Judge); Haily Perkins, Administrative Office of the Courts; Stephanie Wright, Snohomish County.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.