

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 2032

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE, MARCH 23, 1993

**Brief Description:** Authorizing counties with a population of one million or more to have family court and mental health commissioners.

**SPONSORS:** Representatives Appelwick and R. Fisher; by request of Administrator for the Courts

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE**

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators A. Smith, Chairman; Hargrove, McCaslin, Nelson, Niemi, and Spanel.

**Staff:** Lidia Mori (786-7755)

**Hearing Dates:** March 22, 1993; March 23, 1993

**BACKGROUND:**

Superior courts may appoint family court commissioners and mental health commissioners to assist the court in handling family law cases and mental health commitment hearings. The superior courts' authority to appoint family law and mental health commissioners is derived from statute.

Prior to 1991, "class A counties and counties of the first through ninth classes," including King County, had statutory authority to appoint family court and mental health commissioners. A county's "class" was determined by population. Prior to 1991, a class "A" county had a population of 210,000 or more. In 1991, the Legislature passed a comprehensive bill that eliminated the entire classification scheme. Every statute that referenced a classification was amended to substitute the approximate population range associated with the county class.

The statutes governing county authority to appoint family and mental health commissioners were amended to authorize those appointments in "each county with a population of less than one million". The effect of the amendment was to authorize commissioner appointments in every county except King County. Deleting King County's authority to appoint court commissioners was an inadvertent error.

**SUMMARY:**

All counties, including King County, may appoint family and mental health commissioners to help the superior court handle cases concerning family law and mental health commitments.

**Appropriation:** none

**Revenue:** none

**Fiscal Note:** none requested

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

**TESTIMONY FOR:**

Four full-time commissioners now hear family law cases and mental health commitment hearings. In their absence, four full-time judges would have to take their place.

**TESTIMONY AGAINST:** None

**TESTIFIED:** Judge Ann Ellington, King County Superior Court Judge  
(pro)