

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1398

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to superior court judges.

Brief Description: Creating additional judicial positions in the Spokane superior court.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Law & Justice (originally sponsored by Representatives Benson, Sheahan, Sump, Wood, O'Brien and Gombosky; by request of Administrator for the Courts).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Law & Justice: 2/14/97, 2/19/97 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/28/97, 95-0.

Senate Amended.

House Concurred.

Passed Legislature.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Sheahan, Chairman; McDonald, Vice Chairman; Sterk, Vice Chairman; Costa, Ranking Minority Member; Constantine, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Carrell; Cody; Kenney; Lambert; Lantz; Radcliff; Sherstad and Skinner.

Staff: Edie Adams (786-7180).

Background: The Legislature sets by statute the number of superior court judges in each county. Periodically, the Office of the Administrator for the Courts (OAC) conducts a weighted caseload analysis to determine the need for additional judges in the various counties. Spokane County has 11 statutorily authorized judges, Snohomish County has thirteen judges, and Pierce County has 19 judges. The analysis by the OAC indicates a need, as of 1996, for an additional 3.37 judicial officers in Spokane County, an additional 6.19 judicial officers in Snohomish County, and an additional 8.37 judicial officers in Pierce County.

Retirement benefits and one-half of the salary of a superior court judge are paid by the state. The other half of the judge's salary and all other costs associated with a judicial position, such as capital and support staff costs, are borne by the county.

Summary of Bill: The number of statutorily authorized judicial positions in Spokane County is increased from 11 to 13. The additional judicial positions take effect upon the effective date of the act, but the actual starting dates may be established by the Spokane County Commissioners upon the request of the superior court.

The number of judicial positions in Snohomish County is increased from 13 to 15. The new positions take effect January 1, 1998, but the actual starting dates may be established by the Snohomish County council upon request of the superior court and by recommendation of the Snohomish County executive.

The number of judicial positions in Pierce County is increased from 19 to 25. One of the additional judicial positions will take effect January 1, 1998, two will take effect on January 1, 1999, and two will take effect on January 1, 2000. The actual starting dates may be established by the Pierce County council upon request of the superior court and recommendation of the Pierce County executive.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Spokane County courts are very crowded. We need additional judges to provide swift justice in criminal matters and hear the civil cases in a timely manner. Our courts are becoming criminal courts as civil matters continue to get pushed down in the process. The state should pay the entire cost of a superior court judge, because he or she is truly an officer of the state, and it is quite costly for the counties to pay for all costs associated with bringing an additional judge on line.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Benson, prime sponsor; and Justice Richard Guy, Washington State Supreme Court (pro).