

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJR 8203

As of January 27, 1999

Brief Description: Amending the Constitution to establish bar admission requirements for judges.

Sponsors: Senators Eide, Kline, Thibaudeau and Prentice; by request of Board for Judicial Administration.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 1/27/99.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Staff: Dick Armstrong (786-7460)

Background: Article IV, Section 17 of the Washington Constitution provides that a person cannot be a judge of the Supreme Court or of the superior court unless the person is admitted to the practice of law in this state. In addition, various state statutes require a person to be an attorney in this state to be a judge of the Court of Appeals, district court, or municipal court. Cities and counties with less than 5,000 population may have a non-lawyer serve as a judge if the person has passed a qualifying exam prescribed by rule of the Supreme Court. A person must have five years experience as an attorney to run for a judicial position on the Court of Appeals.

Except for the Court of Appeals, there is no requirement that attorneys have any number of years of experience as an attorney prior to seeking judicial office.

Summary of Bill: The state Constitution is amended to require that attorneys must have been admitted to the practice of law for a specified number of years prior to holding judicial office. An attorney must be admitted to the practice of law for at least ten years to run for a position on the Supreme Court, seven years to run for a position on the Court of Appeals, and five years to run for a position on the superior court.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Upon approval by the voters at the next general election.