

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2471

As Reported by House Committee On:
Judiciary

Title: An act relating to the methodology of determining the number of district court judges.

Brief Description: Changing the methodology of determining the number of district court judges.

Sponsors: Representatives Esser, Lantz and Casada; by request of Administrator for the Courts.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Judiciary: 1/29/02, 2/1/02 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Changes the methodology used to determine the number of district court judges.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Lantz, Chair; Hurst, Vice Chair; Carrell, Ranking Minority Member; Boldt, Dickerson, Esser, Jarrett, Lovick and Lysen.

Staff: Edie Adams (786-7180).

Background:

The number of district court judges in each county is set by statute. Any change in the number of full or part-time judges in a county must be made by the Legislature after receiving a recommendation from the supreme court. The recommendation must be based on a weighted caseload analysis conducted by the Office of the Administrator for the Courts (OAC). The weighted caseload analysis must take into account a number of factors, including: the time that existing judges have available to hear cases; the judicial time needed to process various types of cases; and a determination of the amount of a judge's time that can be devoted exclusively to process cases.

Summary of Bill:

The weighted caseload analysis used by the supreme court to make recommendations regarding a change in the number of district court judges in a county is changed to an "objective workload analysis." The objective workload analysis must take into account available judicial resources and the caseload activity of the court.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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

Testimony For: Changing to an objective workload analysis will provide more flexibility in developing a procedure for determining judicial need. The weighted caseload analysis has some inherent problems, including that it is based on old data that is very difficult to update. The last time the weights were updated for district courts was in 1991. Changes in the types of cases that are brought and how certain types of cases are handled makes the weights less accurate. The OAC started working with the superior courts two years ago to develop a model that addresses some of the problems with the weighted caseload analysis. The process has led to the development of an objective input-output model that is a better predictor of judicial need. The OAC has just convened a workgroup to develop a model for district courts.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Esser, prime sponsor; and Mary McQueen, Office of the Administrator for the Courts.