

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 6596

As Passed House:

March 6, 2002

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

Brief Description: Increasing the number of Spokane district court judges.

Sponsors: By Senators McCaslin, Brown, Long, Sheahan, Johnson, Kline, Roach and West.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Judiciary: 2/28/02 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/6/02, 93-0.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Increases the number of district court judges in Spokane County from nine to 10.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Lantz, Chair; Hurst, Vice Chair; Carrell, Ranking Minority Member; Dickerson, Esser, Jarrett, Lovick and Lysen.

Staff: Bill Perry (786-7123).

Background:

The number of elected district court judges in each county is set by statute, and the number of judges in any county may be increased only through a procedure also set out in statute.

Upon the recommendation of the supreme court, the Legislature may increase the number of judges in a county. The recommendation of the supreme court is to be based on a weighted caseload analysis of the need for additional judges in a county. The analysis is

to take into account a variety of factors including how much time existing judges in the county currently have to hear cases and how much judicial time is needed for various kinds of cases.

The addition of a new district court judge position is conditional upon to the agreement by the county legislative authority to pay all costs associated with the creation of the new position. A county may take up to two years to phase in new judicial positions created by the Legislature.

There are currently nine elected district court judges in Spokane County.

Summary of Bill:

An additional district court judge position is authorized for Spokane County, bringing the total number of district court judges in the county to 10.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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

Testimony For: There is a clearly demonstrated need for at least one additional judge in the Spokane County District Court. The outdated weighted caseload method of assessing the need for judicial positions does not take into account many factors, including changes in the laws over time and the special needs of local courts. For instance, the weighted caseload method assumes a much lower average time per case for DUI cases than recent studies by King County and by Spokane County have shown. A more accurate objective analysis of workload shows that Spokane County needs an additional judge. The county legislative authority wants the new position to be created and has agreed to pay for it. There will be no state expense.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Judge Mike Padden, Judge Donna Wilson, and Court Administrator Ron Miles, Spokane District Court; Commissioner Kate McCaslin, Spokane County; and Melanie Stuart, Washington District and Municipal Court Association.