

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1236

As Reported by House Committee On: Judiciary

Title: An act relating to increasing the number of judges to be elected in Grant county.

Brief Description: Increasing the number of judges to be elected in Grant county.

Sponsors: Representatives Warnick, Hinkle, Condotta, Armstrong, Klippert and Moeller; by request of Board For Judicial Administration.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Judiciary: 1/27/11, 2/3/11 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Increases the number of district court judges in Grant County from two to three.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Pedersen, Chair; Goodman, Vice Chair; Shea, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Eddy, Frockt, Kirby, Klippert, Nealey, Orwall, Rivers and Roberts.

Staff: Kelly Pfundheller (786-7289).

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.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The addition of a new district court judge position is conditional upon 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 two elected district court judges in Grant County.

Summary of Bill:

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

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Grant County is a great place to live. While it is historically rural, Grant County is now experiencing increased urbanization, which places a greater demand on the courts. Grant County needs an additional elected district court judge. The committee should support the bill.

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) estimates that Grant County needs 3.3 district court judges. Currently, there are two elected judges and one full time commissioner. However, commissioners are unable to manage the same caseload of judges because commissioners are limited to hearing only certain types of cases.

Grant County District Court is unique because the court travels to eight outlying municipalities to hear municipal cases. This work was not included in the AOC's estimate because it is not managed through the Judicial Information System. In addition, Grant County has a 28.3 percent need for Spanish interpreters, which is 14.3 percent greater than the state average.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Warnick, prime sponsor; Mellani McAleenan, Board of Judicial Administration; Carolann Swartz, Board of County Commissioners, Grant County; and Janis Whitener-Maberg, Grant County District Court.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.