

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1061

---

### As Reported by House Committee On: Judiciary

**Title:** An act relating to increasing the number of district court judges in Skagit county.

**Brief Description:** Increasing the number of district court judges in Skagit county.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Hayes, Lytton, Smith, Gregerson, Moeller and Buys; by request of Board For Judicial Administration.

#### **Brief History:**

##### **Committee Activity:**

Judiciary: 1/13/15, 1/15/15, 1/22/15 [DP].

#### **Brief Summary of Bill**

- Raises the number of statutorily authorized district court judges in Skagit County from two to three.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Jinkins, Chair; Kilduff, Vice Chair; Rodne, Ranking Minority Member; Goodman, Haler, Hansen, Kirby, Klippert, Muri, Orwall, Stokesbary and Walkinshaw.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Shea, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

**Staff:** Omeara Harrington (786-7136).

#### **Background:**

The number of district court judges in each county is set by statute. Any change in the number of full- and part-time judges in a county's district court is determined by the Legislature after receiving a recommendation from the Board for Judicial Administration (BJA). The BJA's recommendation is based on an objective workload analysis developed

---

*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.*

annually by the Administrative Office of the Courts. The objective workload analysis takes into account available judicial resources and the caseload activity of the court.

In order for an additional judicial position to become effective, the legislative authority of the affected county must approve the position and agree to pay the expenses associated with the new position out of county funds and without reimbursement from the state.

Skagit County has two elected district court judges. The BJA recommends an increase in the number of district court judge positions in Skagit County.

---

**Summary of Bill:**

The number of statutorily authorized district court judges in Skagit County is increased from two to three. This new position becomes effective only if the legislative authority of Skagit County approves the position and agrees that the county will pay the expenses of the additional position without reimbursement from the state.

---

**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) This legislation is on request of the BJA, and the county commissioners are in support. The population of Skagit County has grown significantly as has the caseload, but the bench has not grown. This legislation brings the county needed flexibility regarding the use of judges versus commissioners. Judges are more versatile than commissioners and can hear trials. In the 1980s a third judge was approved in statute, but the county decided to appoint a commissioner instead and the statute was changed back. The new judge position would replace a commissioner position, but the court will still be understaffed. Trying to schedule jury trials with two judges in a four-court system is difficult. There is a limit on how many days per year a judge pro tempore can be used. The only speedy trial dismissals were during a sudden bump in impaired driving trials 10 years ago. However, speedy trial deadlines are a constant challenge.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Hayes, prime sponsor; Mellani McAleenan, Board for Judicial Administration; and David Svaren, Skagit County.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.