

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SSB 5621

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Civil Rights & Judiciary

**Title:** An act relating to increasing the jurisdictional amount for small claims courts.

**Brief Description:** Increasing the jurisdictional amount for small claims courts.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Law & Justice (originally sponsored by Senators Warnick, Padden, Holy, Wagoner and Wilson, L.).

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Civil Rights & Judiciary: 3/19/19, 3/26/19 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Increases the jurisdiction of the small claims department in each district court from \$5,000 to \$10,000, but only for cases brought by a natural person.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS & JUDICIARY

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Jinkins, Chair; Thai, Vice Chair; Irwin, Ranking Minority Member; Dufault, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Goodman, Graham, Hansen, Kilduff, Kirby, Klippert, Orwall, Valdez, Walen and Ybarra.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Shea.

**Staff:** Cece Clynch (786-7195).

**Background:**

Within each district court is a small claims department which has nonexclusive jurisdiction over cases for the recovery of money only if the amount claimed does not exceed \$5,000. In small claims cases, formal pleadings are not required, and hearings and dispositions are conducted informally. Each party in a small claims case is usually self-represented, and attorneys are not allowed to participate unless the judge grants permission.

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*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.*

Generally, any individual, business, partnership, or corporation may bring a small claims suit against any other individual, business, partnership, or corporation. Small claims usually must be filed in the district court of the county in which the defendant resides. Appeals may be taken to the superior court, but no party may appeal a judgment where the amount claimed is less than \$250, and the party who filed the claim may not appeal unless the amount claimed exceeds \$1,000.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The jurisdiction of the small claims department in each district court is raised to \$10,000 for cases brought by a natural person. The jurisdictional limit remains at \$5,000 for all other cases. "Natural person" means a human being.

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**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 bill is brought forward at the request of a constituent. Raising the jurisdictional limit of small claims courts to \$10,000 makes sense. Small claims courts are the peoples' courts. The bill originally raised the limit for everyone, but the Senate amended the bill to provide for a higher limit only for natural persons, defined as human beings. The sponsor would be interested in returning the bill to its original form and allowing the higher limit to apply to commercial entities as well as individuals. Small businesses such as landscapers and plumbers may be incorporated and have claims that are in the \$7,500 range. They should be able to avail themselves of small claims courts.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Senator Warnick, prime sponsor.

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