
Civil Rights & Judiciary Committee

HB 1992

Brief Description: Adding an additional superior court judge in Whatcom county.

Sponsors: Representatives Timmons, Lekanoff, Ramel, Fosse and Reeves; by request of Administrative Office of the Courts.

<p style="text-align: center;">Brief Summary of Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increases from four to five the number of statutorily authorized superior court judges in Whatcom County.

Hearing Date: 1/26/24

Staff: Yelena Baker (786-7301).

Background:

Superior courts are courts of general jurisdiction and handle felony and other criminal matters, civil matters, domestic relations matters, guardianship and probate matters, juvenile matters, and child dependency cases. Additionally, superior court judges hear appeals from lower courts and appeals from state administrative agencies.

The number of superior court judges in each county is set by statute. Any change in the number of full- and part-time judges in a county's superior 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 annually by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). The objective workload analysis takes into account available judicial resources and the caseload activity of the court.

Article 4, section 13 of the Washington Constitution provides that the state and the county share

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the cost for superior court judges. Benefits and one-half of the salary of a superior court judge are paid by the state. The other half of the judge's salary and all other costs associated with a judicial position, such as capital and support staff costs, are borne by the county.

New superior court positions are filled by gubernatorial appointment. The appointed judge must then stand for election at the next general election.

Whatcom County currently has four superior court judges, with the fourth judicial position added by the Legislature in 2013.

Summary of Bill:

An additional superior court judicial position is created in Whatcom County, changing the number of superior court judges from four to five.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 25, 2024.

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