
SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1909

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By House Civil Rights & Judiciary (originally sponsored by Representatives Taylor, Goodman, Hill, Bernbaum, Farivar, Simmons, Peterson, Macri, Ortiz-Self, Walen, Ramel, Ryu, Thomas, Salahuddin, Duerr, Reed, Zahn, Entenman, Fey, Wylie, Richards, Cortes, Berry, Tharinger, Parshley, Berg, Santos, Ormsby, Pollet, and Davis)

READ FIRST TIME 02/20/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to establishing the court unification task force;
2 adding a new chapter to Title 2 RCW; creating a new section; and
3 providing an expiration date.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that:

6 (a) Washingtonians seeking legal help encounter barriers
7 navigating disparate local court rules or incur increased costs for
8 legal practitioners to navigate these systems;

9 (b) Specific groups of Washingtonians, such as those living in
10 rural areas or in poverty, may be inequitably impacted by courts'
11 disparate adoption of technology to create remote filing, record
12 sharing, processes, procedures, and hearings;

13 (c) Disparate local rules and adoption of technology make it
14 difficult for lawyers, including those engaging in pro bono and legal
15 aid work, to practice in multiple jurisdictions, exacerbating
16 Washington's "legal deserts";

17 (d) Washingtonians seeking legal help may encounter inequitable
18 outcomes due to disparate funding levels and standards from
19 jurisdiction to jurisdiction;

20 (e) City and county leaders have expressed significant and urgent
21 concerns with their ability to fund and implement the Washington

1 state bar association's new standards for indigent defense, which
2 derive from a constitutional mandate; and

3 (f) Disparate funding between the state's court systems can cause
4 inequitable and inconsistent means for jurisdictions to implement and
5 uphold best legal practices and standards.

6 (2) The legislature further finds that potential solutions to
7 these issues warrant further study, including data collection to
8 better understand the impact to the public and the legal profession
9 of disparate local rules, technology, and funding between
10 Washington's court systems.

11 (3) Therefore, the legislature intends to convene and
12 meaningfully engage stakeholders across Washington state, especially
13 those in rural areas, and to study the inefficiencies and inequities
14 resulting from disparate local court rules, funding, and technology.

15 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The court unification task force is
16 established to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the current
17 Washington state court system, including the review of the
18 inefficiencies and inequities resulting from disparate local court
19 rules, technology adoption, and funding levels, and identify areas
20 where a more unified or centralized approach to court operations may
21 improve efficiency and uniformity in the delivery of court and
22 judicial services, as well as consistency in outcomes and ease of
23 access for those who use the court system, including victims,
24 defendants, litigants, and counsel.

25 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** (1) The court unification task force must
26 include the following voting members:

27 (a) Two legislative members, one from each of the two largest
28 caucuses of the house of representatives, appointed by the speaker of
29 the house of representatives. Of the members appointed under this
30 subsection (1)(a), one member must be the current chair of the civil
31 rights and judiciary committee of the house of representatives;

32 (b) Two legislative members, one from each of the two largest
33 caucuses of the senate, appointed by the president of the senate. Of
34 the members appointed under this subsection (1)(b), one must be the
35 current chair of the law and justice committee of the senate;

36 (c) One person representing the governor's office, appointed by
37 the governor;

- 1 (d) One person representing the attorney general's office,
2 appointed by the attorney general;
- 3 (e) Three persons representing cities, appointed by the
4 association of Washington cities as follows: (i) One person
5 representing a municipality with a population of 500,000 or more
6 inhabitants; (ii) one person representing a municipality with a
7 population of 100,000 or more inhabitants, but fewer than 500,000
8 inhabitants; and (iii) one person representing a municipality with a
9 population of fewer than 100,000 inhabitants;
- 10 (f) One person who is an elected county councilmember
11 representing counties, appointed by the Washington state association
12 of counties;
- 13 (g) One person representing court clerks, appointed by the
14 Washington state association of county clerks;
- 15 (h) 12 members from the judicial branch, appointed by the chief
16 justice in consultation with the board of judicial administration,
17 supreme court, court of appeals, superior court judges association,
18 association of Washington superior court administrators, Washington
19 association of juvenile court administrators, district and municipal
20 court judges association, district and municipal court management
21 association, misdemeanor probation association, and access to
22 justice board. Of the members appointed under this subsection (1)(h):
23 (i) Two members must be appointed to represent the superior court
24 judges association, with one member representing western Washington
25 and the other member representing eastern Washington; and (ii) two
26 members must be appointed to represent the district and municipal
27 court judges association, with one member representing western
28 Washington and the other member representing eastern Washington;
- 29 (i) One person appointed by and representing the tribal state
30 court consortium;
- 31 (j) One person appointed by and representing the office of public
32 defense;
- 33 (k) One person appointed by and representing the office of civil
34 legal aid;
- 35 (l) One person appointed by and representing the administrative
36 office of the courts;
- 37 (m) One person appointed by and representing the Washington state
38 bar association;
- 39 (n) One person appointed by and representing the Washington
40 association of prosecuting attorneys;

1 (o) One person appointed by and representing the Washington state
2 paralegal association;

3 (p) One person employed by and representing a community-based
4 nonprofit organization that provides advocacy and support services,
5 but not including legal representation, to court-involved
6 individuals;

7 (q) One person appointed by and representing the Washington
8 association of sheriffs and police chiefs;

9 (r) One person appointed by and representing an organization that
10 represents survivors of gender-based violence;

11 (s) Two people who have lived experience as a litigant in a civil
12 court matter and who are appointed by the office of civil legal aid.
13 Of the members appointed under this subsection (1)(s): (i) One person
14 must be from one of the five largest counties; and (ii) the other
15 person must be someone who was unrepresented in their civil legal
16 matter; and

17 (t) One formerly incarcerated person appointed by the office of
18 public defense.

19 (2) The task force shall have two cochairs. One cochair must be
20 the chair of the civil rights and judiciary committee of the house of
21 representatives and the other cochair must be the chief justice of
22 the supreme court. The cochairs shall set the agenda and provide
23 leadership and direction for the task force.

24 (3) Members of the task force shall be reimbursed for travel
25 expenses. Legislative members of the task force shall be reimbursed
26 for travel expenses in accordance with RCW 44.04.120. Reimbursement
27 for nonlegislative members is subject to chapter 43.03 RCW. To ensure
28 that the task force has diverse and inclusive representation of those
29 affected by its work, task force members, including work group
30 members, whose participation in the task force may be hampered by
31 financial hardship may be compensated as provided in RCW 43.03.220.

32 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** The court unification task force has the
33 following powers:

34 (1)(a) The task force may form issue-specific subcommittees to
35 focus on issues relevant to the work of the task force including, but
36 not limited to: Information technology in courts; court capacity and
37 funding; small and rural courts; facilities and personnel; court
38 provided services; and the impact of legislative changes on court
39 resources and processes.

1 (b) The task force shall define the scope of activity and subject
2 matter focus required of each subcommittee.

3 (c) A subcommittee may set its own agenda and terminate upon
4 completion of the subcommittee's work. Subcommittee meetings may
5 occur in person or in a virtual or hybrid format.

6 (2) The voting membership of each subcommittee is composed of a
7 subset of members appointed to the task force, as determined by
8 majority vote of the task force. A subcommittee may invite persons
9 with relevant expertise to participate in the subcommittee's work as
10 nonvoting members on an ongoing, recurring, or one-time basis.

11 (3) Consistent with funds appropriated specifically for this
12 purpose, the task force may hire staff or contract for professional
13 assistance.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1) The court unification task force shall
15 hold its first meeting by October 1, 2025, and shall complete its
16 work by December 31, 2028. The task force shall hold no fewer than
17 two meetings of the full membership of the task force each calendar
18 year.

19 (2) By June 30, 2026, the task force shall submit a preliminary
20 report to the interbranch advisory committee created in chapter 2.76
21 RCW and to the relevant committees of the legislature.

22 (3) By June 30, 2027, the task force shall submit its final
23 report to the interbranch advisory committee created in chapter 2.76
24 RCW and to the relevant committees of the legislature. The final
25 report must propose specific solutions for the efficient use of
26 resources, including harmonizing any conflicting court policies,
27 practices, and procedures, and include a long-term strategic plan to
28 implement the proposed solutions.

29 (4) After the task force submits its final report and before June
30 30, 2028, the task force shall hold at least one meeting of the full
31 membership of the task force.

32 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** This chapter expires December 31, 2028.

33 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** Sections 2 through 6 of this act
34 constitute a new chapter in Title 2 RCW.

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