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HOUSE BILL 1909

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State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

**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 02/10/25. Referred to Committee on Civil Rights & Judiciary.

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 structure,  
18 policies, practices, and procedures of the state courts, and identify  
19 areas where a more unified or centralized approach to court  
20 operations may improve efficiency and uniformity in the delivery of  
21 court and judicial services, as well as consistency in outcomes and  
22 ease of access for those who use the court system, including victims,  
23 defendants, litigants, and counsel.

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

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

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

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

37 (d) One person representing the attorney general's office,  
38 appointed by the attorney general;

1 (e) One person representing cities, appointed by the association  
2 of Washington cities;

3 (f) One person who is an elected county councilmember  
4 representing counties, appointed by the Washington state association  
5 of counties;

6 (g) One person representing court clerks, appointed by the  
7 Washington state association of county clerks;

8 (h) 12 members from the judicial branch, appointed by the chief  
9 justice in consultation with the board of judicial administration,  
10 supreme court, court of appeals, superior court judges association,  
11 association of Washington superior court administrators, Washington  
12 association of juvenile court administrators, district and municipal  
13 court judges association, district and municipal court management  
14 association, misdemeanor probation association, and access to  
15 justice board. Of the members appointed under this subsection (1)(h):  
16 (i) Two members must be appointed to represent the superior court  
17 judges association, with one member representing western Washington  
18 and the other member representing eastern Washington; and (ii) two  
19 members must be appointed to represent the district and municipal  
20 court judges association, with one member representing western  
21 Washington and the other member representing eastern Washington;

22 (i) One person appointed by and representing the tribal state  
23 court consortium;

24 (j) One person appointed by and representing the office of public  
25 defense;

26 (k) One person appointed by and representing the office of civil  
27 legal aid;

28 (l) One person appointed by and representing the administrative  
29 office of the courts;

30 (m) One person appointed by and representing the Washington state  
31 bar association;

32 (n) One person appointed by and representing the Washington  
33 association of prosecuting attorneys;

34 (o) One person appointed by and representing the Washington state  
35 paralegal association;

36 (p) One person employed by and representing a community-based  
37 nonprofit organization that provides advocacy and support services,  
38 but not including legal representation, to court-involved  
39 individuals;

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

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

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

11 (t) One formerly incarcerated person appointed by the office of  
12 public defense.

13 (2) The task force shall have two cochairs. One cochair must be  
14 the chair of the civil rights and judicial committee of the house of  
15 representatives and the other cochair must be the chief justice of  
16 the supreme court. The cochairs shall set the agenda and provide  
17 leadership and direction for the task force.

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 (3) Consistent with funds appropriated specifically for this  
7 purpose, the task force may hire staff or contract for professional  
8 assistance.

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

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

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

24 (4) After the task force submits its final report and before June  
25 30, 2028, the task force shall hold at least one meeting of the full  
26 membership of the task force.

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

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

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