
HOUSE BILL 1909

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, and Santos

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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