



ALASKA COURT SYSTEM State of Alaska

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HOUSE BILL 298 NUMBER OF SUPERIOR COURT JUDGES Version A

Sponsor Statement

The Alaska Court System is requesting a change to AS 22.10.120 to increase the number of superior court judges in the state from 42 to 43. Specifically, the court is seeking authorization for the additional superior court seat so that one of the two existing district court slots in Juneau can be converted to a superior court judgeship. Superior court judges have broader jurisdiction than district court judges; the change would allow the new judge to handle a greater variety of cases, thus ensuring that the caseload in Juneau is handled more efficiently and effectively.

The two existing Juneau superior court judges handle about 590 cases per judge per year, the second-highest caseload per superior court judge of any court except Anchorage (where other resources are available to assist with cases). The high caseload has resulted in a reduced capacity to schedule and decide matters as expeditiously as the court system would like.

Further, one of long-serving district court judges in Juneau has announced his plan to retire effective June 30, 2018. This bill is therefore timely; if passed, the solicitation for applicants to that soon-to-be-vacant position will be for a superior court rather than a district court judge.

The new superior court judge will share a judicial assistant and law clerk with the existing Juneau judges, and would have the already-existing courtroom and materials from the district court position, so that no additional resources are necessary. The court system will absorb the additional salary and benefits for the superior court judge with savings it has achieved elsewhere through attrition. Therefore, House Bill 298 has a zero fiscal note.