

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 5301 PCB JUA 21-01 Judges
SPONSOR(S): Justice Appropriations Subcommittee, Plakon and others
TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:**

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 117 Y's 0 N's **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Approved

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

HB 5301 passed the House on April 30, 2021, as amended, and subsequently passed the Senate on April 30, 2021.

The Supreme Court issued Order No. SC20-1668, dated December 3, 2020, certifying the need for one additional circuit court judge (Fourteenth Circuit) and two additional county court judges (Hillsborough County).

Article V of the Florida Constitution states the legislature may reject the recommendation or accept the recommendation in whole or in part, decreasing or increasing the number of judges by more or less than the judicial recommendation upon a two thirds finding of need by both chambers of the legislature.

HB 5301 established four new county court judgeships (one in Citrus County, two in Hillsborough County, and one in St. Johns County), and one new circuit court judgeship in the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit.

The General Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2021-2022 authorizes ten full-time equivalent (FTE) positions with associated salary rate of 1,005,383 and includes \$1,638,899 in General Revenue funding to establish the additional circuit and county court judgeships and associated judicial assistant staffing. See Fiscal Impact & Economic Impact Statement.

The bill was approved by the Governor on June 2, 2021, ch. 2021-45, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2021.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Background

Article V, Section 9 of the State Constitution states:

“Determination of number of judges.—The supreme court shall establish by rule uniform criteria for the determination of the need for additional judges except supreme court justices, the necessity for decreasing the number of judges and for increasing, decreasing or redefining appellate districts and judicial circuits. If the supreme court finds that a need exists for increasing or decreasing the number of judges or increasing, decreasing or redefining appellate districts and judicial circuits, it shall, prior to the next regular session of the legislature, certify to the legislature its findings and recommendations concerning such need. Upon receipt of such certificate, the legislature, at the next regular session, shall consider the findings and recommendations and may reject the recommendations or by law implement the recommendations in whole or in part; provided the legislature may create more judicial offices than are recommended by the supreme court or may decrease the number of judicial offices by a greater number than recommended by the court only upon a finding of two-thirds of the membership of both houses of the legislature, that such a need exists.”

To determine a need for trial court judgeships, the Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA) relies on an analysis of weighted caseload filings per judge. In 1999, at the request of the Florida Legislature, OSCA contracted with the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) to develop and validate a Delphi-based Weighted Caseload System.¹

The weighted caseload system assigns a time value to cases by their case type, based on the various kinds and complexity of the cases that are filed. The case type time value, or case weight, establishes an approximate workload value per case filing by case type, which is used to determine the number of judges required to handle these cases. The weighted caseload system is revised periodically to account for changes in procedure and case complexity. The system was updated by OSCA and NCSC in 2007, and most recently in 2016.

The Supreme Court issued Order No. SC20-1668, dated December 3, 2020, in regard to the Certification of Need for Additional Judges.² In the certification, the Court recommended one new circuit judgeship in the Fourteenth judicial circuit and two new county judgeships in Hillsborough County.

Section 11, Article V of the State Constitution requires the Governor to fill judicial office vacancies by appointment from a list of candidates nominated by a judicial nominating commission³, for a term ending on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in January of the year following the next general election occurring at least one year after the date of appointment.

¹ National Center for State Courts, *Florida Judicial Workload Assessment Final Report*, Office of the State Courts Administrator (May 16, 2016), <http://www.flcourts.org/core/fileparse.php/558/urlt/Final-Florida-Judicial-Workload-Assessment-Final-report.pdf>

² *Certification of Need for Additional Judges*, SC20-1668 (Fla. SC 2020)

³ Article V, Section 20, Subsection (5) of the State Constitution states that each judicial nomination commission shall be composed of nine members. Three members must be appointed by the Board of Governors of The Florida Bar from among The Florida Bar members who are actively engaged in the practice of law with offices within the territorial jurisdiction of the affected court, district or circuit. Three electors must reside in the territorial jurisdiction of the court or circuit appointed by the governor. And three of the electors must reside in the territorial jurisdiction of the court or circuit and who are not members of the bar of Florida, selected and appointed by a majority vote of the other six members of the commission.

Effect of the Bill

HB 5301 established four new county court judgeships (one in Citrus County, two in Hillsborough County, and one in St. Johns County), and one new circuit court judgeship in the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit.

The bill will become effective July 1, 2021.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

The General Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2021-2022 (SB 2500) authorizes ten full-time equivalent (FTE) positions with associated salary rate of 1,005,383 and includes \$1,638,899 in General Revenue funding to establish the additional circuit and county court judgeships and associated judicial assistant staffing (one circuit court judge, with a judicial assistant; and four county court judges, each with a judicial assistant).

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

The cost of county judges, circuit judges, judicial assistants and law clerks are paid for by the state. Under s. 29.008, F.S., counties are responsible for facilities, security, communications and information technology costs for county courts. For counties receiving additional judges and associated staff, this bill may result in additional costs in these areas.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.