

**Chapter 3.34 RCW
DISTRICT JUDGES**

Sections

- 3.34.010 District judges—Number for each county.
- 3.34.020 District judges—Number—Changes.
- 3.34.025 District judge positions—Approval and agreement.
- 3.34.040 District judges—Full time—Other.
- 3.34.050 District judges—Election.
- 3.34.060 District judges—Eligibility and qualifications.
- 3.34.070 District judges—Term of office.
- 3.34.080 Oath—District judges—Court commissioners.
- 3.34.090 Bonds—Insurance as reimbursable expense.
- 3.34.100 District judges—Vacancies—Remuneration.
- 3.34.110 District judicial officers—Disqualification.
- 3.34.120 District judges—Disqualification of partners.
- 3.34.130 District judges pro tempore—Reduction in salary of replaced judges—Exception—Reimbursement of counties.
- 3.34.140 Exchange of district judges—Reimbursement for expenses.
- 3.34.150 Presiding judge.

RCW 3.34.010 District judges—Number for each county. The minimum number of district judges to be elected in each county shall be: Adams, two; Asotin, one; Benton, five; Chelan, two; Clallam, two; Clark, six; Columbia, one; Cowlitz, three; Douglas, one; Ferry, one; Franklin, one; Garfield, one; Grant, three; Grays Harbor, two; Island, one; Jefferson, one; King, twenty-three in 2009, twenty-five in 2010, and twenty-six in 2011; Kitsap, four; Kittitas, two; Klickitat, two; Lewis, two; Lincoln, one; Mason, one; Okanogan, two; Pacific, two; Pend Oreille, one; Pierce, eleven; San Juan, one; Skagit, three; Skamania, one; Snohomish, nine; Spokane, eight; Stevens, one; Thurston, three; Wahkiakum, one; Walla Walla, two; Whatcom, two; Whitman, one; Yakima, four. This number may be increased only as provided in RCW 3.34.020. [2024 c 103 s 1; 2023 c 5 s 1; 2015 3rd sp.s. c 25 s 1; 2011 c 43 s 1. Prior: 2009 c 86 s 1; 2009 c 26 s 1; 2008 c 63 s 1; 2005 c 91 s 1; 2003 c 97 s 1; 2002 c 138 s 1; 1998 c 64 s 1; 1995 c 168 s 1; 1994 c 111 s 1; 1991 c 354 s 1; 1989 c 227 s 6; 1987 c 202 s 111; 1975 1st ex.s. c 153 s 1; 1973 1st ex.s. c 14 s 1; 1971 ex.s. c 147 s 1; 1970 ex.s. c 23 s 1; 1969 ex.s. c 66 s 1; 1965 ex.s. c 110 s 5; 1961 c 299 s 10.]

District judge position for Skagit county—2015 3rd sp.s. c 25: "The additional judicial position created by section 1 of this act in Skagit county becomes effective only if the county, through its duly constituted legislative authority, documents its approval of the additional position and its agreement that it will pay out of county funds, without reimbursement from the state, the expenses of the additional judicial position as provided by statute." [2015 3rd sp.s. c 25 s 2.]

District judge position for Clark county—2005 c 91: See note following RCW 3.34.025.

Effective date—2003 c 97: "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately [May 7, 2003]." [2003 c 97 s 6.]

Effective date—1995 c 168: "This is act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and shall take effect immediately [May 1, 1995]." [1995 c 168 s 2.]

Intent—1989 c 227: See note following RCW 3.38.070.

Intent—1987 c 202: See note following RCW 2.04.190.

RCW 3.34.020 District judges—Number—Changes. (1) Any increase in the number of full and part-time district judges after January 1, 1992, shall be determined by the county legislative authority of the affected county after receiving a recommendation from the supreme court. The supreme court shall make its recommendations to the county legislative authority based on an objective workload analysis that takes into account available judicial resources and the caseload activity of each court.

(2) The administrator for the courts, under the supervision of the supreme court, may consult with the board of judicial administration and the district and municipal court judges' association in developing the procedures and methods of applying the objective workload analysis.

(3) For each recommended change from the number of full and part-time district judges in any county as of January 1, 1992, the administrator for the courts, under the supervision of the supreme court, shall complete a judicial impact note detailing any local or state cost associated with such recommended change.

(4) If the county legislative authority approves an increase in the base number of district judges in any county as of January 1, 1992, such increase in the base number of district judges and all related costs may be paid for by the county from moneys provided under RCW 82.14.310, and any such costs shall be deemed to be expended for criminal justice purposes as provided in *RCW 82.14.315, and such expenses shall not constitute a supplanting of existing funding.

(5) (a) A county legislative authority that desires to increase the number of full or part-time district judges from the base number on January 1, 1992, must first request the assistance of the supreme court. The administrator for the courts, under the supervision of the supreme court, shall conduct an objective workload analysis and make a recommendation of its findings to the county legislative authority for consideration as provided in this section. Changes in the number of district court judges may only be made by the county legislative authority in a year in which the quadrennial election for district court judges is not held.

(b) The legislative authority of any county may change a part-time district judge position to a full-time position. [2024 c 103 s 2; 2003 c 97 s 2; 2002 c 83 s 1; 1997 c 41 s 3; 1991 c 313 s 2; 1987 c 202 s 112; 1984 c 258 s 8; 1982 c 29 s 1; 1973 1st ex.s. c 14 s 2; 1970 ex.s. c 23 s 2; 1969 ex.s. c 66 s 7; 1961 c 299 s 11.]

***Reviser's note:** RCW 82.14.315 expired July 1, 1991.

Effective date—2003 c 97: See note following RCW 3.34.010.

Intent—1987 c 202: See note following RCW 2.04.190.

Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—Short title—1984 c 258: See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.025 District judge positions—Approval and agreement. Any additional district judge positions created under RCW 3.34.020 shall be effective only if the legislative authority of the affected county documents its approval of any additional positions and its agreement that it will pay out of county funds, without reimbursement from the state, the expenses of such additional judicial positions as provided by statute. The additional expenses include, but are not limited to, expenses incurred for court facilities. The legislative authority of any such county may, at its discretion, phase in any judicial positions over a period of time not to exceed two years from the effective date of the additional district judge positions. [1991 c 313 s 3.]

District judge position for Clark county—2005 c 91: "For the purposes of RCW 3.34.025, the district judge position for Clark county created in chapter 97, Laws of 2003, is hereby re-created as of July 24, 2005." [2005 c 91 s 2.]

RCW 3.34.040 District judges—Full time—Other. A district judge serving a district having a population of forty thousand or more persons, and a district judge receiving a salary equal to the maximum salary set by the salary commission under RCW 3.58.020 for district judges shall be deemed full time judges and shall devote all of their time to the office and shall not engage in the practice of law. Other judges shall devote sufficient time to the office to properly fulfill the duties thereof and may engage in other occupations but shall maintain a separate office for private business and shall not use for private business the services of any clerk or secretary paid for by the county or office space or supplies furnished by the judicial district. [1991 c 338 s 2; 1984 c 258 s 10; 1983 c 195 s 1; 1974 ex.s. c 95 s 2; 1971 ex.s. c 147 s 2; 1961 c 299 s 13.]

Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—Short title—1984 c 258: See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.050 District judges—Election. At the general election in November 1962 and quadrennially thereafter, there shall be elected by the voters of each district court district the number of judges authorized for the district by the district court districting plan. Judges shall be elected for each district and electoral district, if any, by the qualified electors of the district in the same manner as judges of courts of record are elected, except as provided in chapter 29A.52 RCW. Not less than ten days before the time for filing declarations of candidacy for the election of judges for districts entitled to more than one judge, the county auditor shall designate each such office of district judge to be filled by a number,

commencing with the number one and numbering the remaining offices consecutively. At the time of the filing of the declaration of candidacy, each candidate shall designate by number which one, and only one, of the numbered offices for which he or she is a candidate and the name of the candidate shall appear on the ballot for only the numbered office for which the candidate filed a declaration of candidacy. [2015 c 53 s 1; 1998 c 19 s 2; 1989 c 227 s 3; 1984 c 258 s 11; 1975-'76 2nd ex.s. c 120 s 8; 1961 c 299 s 14.]

Intent—1989 c 227: See note following RCW 3.38.070.

Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—Short title—1984 c 258: See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

Severability—1975-'76 2nd ex.s. c 120: See note following RCW 29A.52.210.

RCW 3.34.060 District judges—Eligibility and qualifications.

To be eligible to file a declaration of candidacy for and to serve as a district court judge, a person must:

- (1) Be a registered voter of the district court district and electoral district, if any; and
 - (2) Be either:
 - (a) A lawyer admitted to practice law in the state of Washington;
- or

(b) In those districts having a population of less than five thousand persons, a person who has taken and passed by January 1, 2003, the qualifying examination for a lay candidate for judicial officer as provided by rule of the supreme court. [2002 c 136 s 1; 1991 c 361 s 1; 1989 c 227 s 4; 1984 c 258 s 12; 1961 c 299 s 15.]

Intent—1989 c 227: See note following RCW 3.38.070.

Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—Short title—1984 c 258: See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.070 District judges—Term of office. Every district judge shall hold office for a term of four years from and after the second Monday in January next succeeding his or her selection and continuing until a successor is elected and qualified. [1984 c 258 s 13; 1961 c 299 s 16.]

Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—Short title—1984 c 258: See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.080 Oath—District judges—Court commissioners. Each district judge, district judge pro tempore and district court commissioner shall, before entering upon the duties of office, take an oath to support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution and laws of the state of Washington, and to perform the duties of the office faithfully and impartially and to the best of his or her ability. [1984 c 258 s 14; 1961 c 299 s 17.]

**Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—
Short title—1984 c 258:** See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.090 Bonds—Insurance as reimbursable expense. The county legislative authority shall provide for the bonding of each district judge, district judge pro tempore, district court commissioner, clerk of the district court, and court employee, at the expense of the county, in such amount as the county legislative authority shall prescribe, conditioned that each such person will pay over according to law all moneys which shall come into the person's custody in causes filed in the district court. Such bond shall not be less than the maximum amount of money liable to be under the control, at any one time, of each such person in the performance of his or her duties. Such bond may be a blanket bond. If the county obtains errors and omissions insurance covering district court personnel, the costs of such coverage shall be a reimbursable expense pursuant to RCW 3.62.050 as now or hereafter amended. [1984 c 258 s 15; 1971 c 73 s 5; 1961 c 299 s 18.]

**Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—
Short title—1984 c 258:** See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.100 District judges—Vacancies—Remuneration. (1) If a district judge dies, resigns, is convicted of a felony, ceases to reside in the district, fails to serve for any reason except temporary disability, or if his or her term of office is terminated in any other manner, the office shall be deemed vacant. The county legislative authority shall fill all vacancies by appointment and the judge thus appointed shall hold office until the next general election and until a successor is elected and qualified. However, if a vacancy in the office of district court judge occurs and the total number of district court judges remaining in the county is equal to or greater than the number of district court judges authorized in RCW 3.34.010 then the position shall remain vacant. District judges shall be granted sick leave in the same manner as other county employees. A district judge may receive when vacating office remuneration for unused accumulated leave and sick leave at a rate equal to one day's monetary compensation for each full day of accrued leave and one day's monetary compensation for each four full days of accrued sick leave, the total remuneration for leave and sick leave not to exceed the equivalent of thirty days' monetary compensation.

(2) During any vacancy that occurs pursuant to subsection (1) of this section in a single judge court, a presiding judge pro tempore who has been predesignated pursuant to court rule or appointed pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2) may fulfill presiding judge duties, and the authority of the predesignated or appointed presiding judge pro tempore endures until the chief justice appoints someone else to fulfill the presiding judge duties pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2)(b), or until a vacancy in the position is filled as provided by law, whichever occurs first. [2022 c 74 s 6; 2003 c 97 s 3; 1992 c 76 s 1; 1984 c 258 s 16; 1961 c 299 s 19.]

Effective date—2003 c 97: See note following RCW 3.34.010.

**Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—
Short title—1984 c 258:** See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.110 District judicial officers—Disqualification. (1) A district court judicial officer shall not preside in any of the following cases:

(a) In an action to which the judicial officer is a party, or in which the judicial officer is directly interested, or in which the judicial officer has been an attorney for a party.

(b) When the judicial officer or one of the parties believes that the parties cannot have an impartial trial or hearing before the judicial officer. The judicial officer shall disqualify himself or herself under the provisions of this section if, before any discretionary ruling has been made, a party files an affidavit that the party cannot have a fair and impartial trial or hearing by reason of the interest or prejudice of the judicial officer. The following are not considered discretionary rulings: (i) The arrangement of the calendar; (ii) the setting of an action, motion, or proceeding for hearing or trial; (iii) the arraignment of the accused; or (iv) the fixing of bail and initially setting conditions of release. Only one change of judicial officer is allowed each party in an action or proceeding.

(2) When a judicial officer is disqualified under this section, the case shall be heard before another judicial officer of the same county.

(3) For the purposes of this section, "judicial officer" means a judge, judge pro tempore, or court commissioner. [2008 c 227 s 7; 1984 c 258 s 17; 1961 c 299 s 20.]

Effective date—Subheadings not law—2008 c 227: See notes following RCW 3.50.003.

**Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—
Short title—1984 c 258:** See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.120 District judges—Disqualification of partners. The partner and associates of a judge who is a lawyer shall not practice law before the judge. [1984 c 258 s 18; 1961 c 299 s 21.]

**Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—
Short title—1984 c 258:** See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.130 District judges pro tempore—Reduction in salary of replaced judges—Exception—Reimbursement of counties. (1) In addition to the designation of a presiding judge pro tempore for a single judge court as provided in RCW 3.34.150(2), each district court shall designate one or more persons as judge pro tempore who shall serve during the temporary absence, disqualification, or incapacity of a district judge or to serve as an additional judge for excess caseload or special set cases. The qualifications of a judge pro tempore shall be the same as for a district judge, except that with respect to RCW 3.34.060(1), the person appointed need only be a registered voter of the state. A district that has a population of not more than ten

thousand and that has no person available who meets the qualifications under *RCW 3.34.060(2) (a) or (b), may appoint as a pro tempore judge a person who has taken and passed the qualifying examination for the office of district judge as is provided by rule of the supreme court. A judge pro tempore may sit in any district of the county for which he or she is appointed. A judge pro tempore shall be paid the salary authorized by the county legislative authority.

(2) For each day that a judge pro tempore serves in excess of thirty days during any calendar year, the annual salary of the district judge in whose place the judge pro tempore serves shall be reduced by an amount equal to one-two hundred fiftieth of such salary: PROVIDED, That each full time district judge shall have up to fifteen days annual leave without reduction for service on judicial commissions established by the legislature or the chief justice of the supreme court. No reduction in salary shall occur when a judge pro tempore serves:

(a) While a district judge is using sick leave granted in accordance with RCW 3.34.100;

(b) While a district court judge is disqualified from serving following the filing of an affidavit of prejudice;

(c) As an additional judge for excess case load or special set cases; or

(d) While a district judge is otherwise involved in administrative, educational, or judicial functions related to the performance of the judge's duties: PROVIDED, That the appointment of judge pro tempore authorized under subsection (2)(c) and (d) of this section is subject to an appropriation for this purpose by the county legislative authority.

(3) The legislature may appropriate money for the purpose of reimbursing counties for the salaries of judges pro tempore for certain days in excess of thirty worked per year that the judge pro tempore was required to work as the result of service by a judge on a commission as authorized under subsection (2) of this section. No later than September 1 of each year, each county treasurer shall certify to the administrator for the courts for the year ending the preceding June 30, the number of days in excess of thirty that any judge pro tempore was required to work as the result of service by a judge on a commission as authorized under subsection (2) of this section. Upon receipt of the certification, the administrator for the courts shall reimburse the county from money appropriated for that purpose. [2022 c 74 s 7; 1996 c 16 s 1; 1994 c 18 s 1; 1993 c 330 s 1; 1986 c 161 s 4; 1984 c 258 s 302; 1984 c 258 s 19; 1983 c 195 s 2; 1981 c 331 s 9; 1961 c 299 s 22.]

***Reviser's note:** RCW 3.34.060 was amended by 2002 c 136 s 1, deleting subsection (2)(b).

Severability—1986 c 161: See note following RCW 43.03.010.

Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—Short title—1984 c 258: See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

Legislative intent—1984 c 258 ss 302-340: "It is the intent of the legislature to assure accountability, uniformity, economy, and efficiency in the collection and distribution by superior, district, and municipal courts of fees, fines, forfeitures, and penalties

assessed and collected for violations of state, statutes, and county, city, and town ordinances." [1984 c 258 s 301.]

Court Congestion Reduction Act of 1981—Purpose—Severability—
1981 c 331: See notes following RCW 2.32.070.

RCW 3.34.140 Exchange of district judges—Reimbursement for expenses. Any district judge may hold a session in any district in the state, at the request of the judge or majority of judges in the district if the visiting judge determines that the state of business in his or her district allows the judge to be absent. The county legislative authority in which the district court is located shall first approve the temporary absence and the judge pro tempore shall not be required to serve during the judge's absence. A visiting judge shall be entitled to reimbursement for subsistence, lodging, and travel expenses in accordance with the rates applicable to state officers under RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060 as now or hereafter amended while so acting, to be paid by the visited district. These expenses shall not be paid to the visiting judge unless the legislative authority of the county in which the visited district is located has approved the payment before the visit. In addition a visiting part-time district court judge, when not serving in a judicial capacity in his or her district, shall be entitled to compensation for judicial services so long as the legislative authority of the county in which the visited district is located has approved the payment before the visit. [2010 c 191 s 1; 1984 c 258 s 20; 1981 c 186 s 5; 1961 c 299 s 23.]

Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—
Short title—1984 c 258: See notes following RCW 3.30.010.

RCW 3.34.150 Presiding judge. (1) If a district has more than one judge, the supreme court may by rule provide for the manner of selection of one of the judges to serve as presiding judge and prescribe the presiding judge's duties. If a county has multiple districts or has one district with multiple electoral districts, the supreme court may by rule provide for the manner of selection of one of the judges to serve as presiding judge and prescribe the presiding judge's duties.

(2) Pursuant to court rule or RCW 2.56.040(2), a presiding judge pro tempore may be predesignated or appointed to fulfill presiding judge duties in case of the illness, incapacity, resignation, death, or unavailability of the presiding judge of a single judge court. In such circumstances, the authority of the predesignated or appointed presiding judge pro tempore endures until the chief justice appoints someone else to fulfill the presiding judge duties pursuant to RCW 2.56.040(2)(b), or the period of such illness, incapacity, or unavailability ends, or until a vacancy in the position is filled as provided by law, whichever occurs first. [2022 c 74 s 5; 1989 c 227 s 7; 1984 c 258 s 21; 1961 c 299 s 24.]

Intent—1989 c 227: See note following RCW 3.38.070.

**Court Improvement Act of 1984—Effective dates—Severability—
Short title—1984 c 258:** See notes following RCW 3.30.010.