

Law school rebirth in Tacoma gets boost from state Senate

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Richard Hawley holds his son, Nathan, after receiving his degree at commencement exercises for the University of Puget Sound Law School. The ceremony was one of the last before the law school moved from Tacoma to Seattle in 1999. RUSS CARMACK — News Tribune file

State senators want to help bring a law school back to Tacoma.

A spending plan proposed Monday by a bipartisan group of Senate budget writers includes \$400,000 to develop a Tacoma campus of the University of Washington School of Law.

But even if the money remains in the budget as it moves through the Republican-controlled Senate and Democrat-led House to Gov. Jay Inslee's desk, it won't be enough to cover the full startup cost for a legal education program.

It could, however, provide a kind of state endorsement for the business and civic leaders who are trying to create the program at UWT. The group has been looking into the prospects for raising private money and support.

Tacoma Republican Sen. Steve O'Ban said he asked for the funding, calling it seed money that could persuade donors the group is well on the way to its goal of more than \$2 million.

There is no law school between Seattle and Portland. Seattle University bought the South Sound's only law school from the University of Puget Sound and moved it out of Tacoma in 1999.

O'Ban, a lawyer who graduated from UPS law in Tacoma, said restoring a law school could attract high-caliber attorneys to the area.

"You'd hope they come to Tacoma to go to law school and stay there and practice there," he said.

Despite the early funding step, a law school campus would require decisions by UW that haven't been made. The university didn't ask for money from lawmakers.

"It's not our request, and it's a bit of a surprise," UW spokesman Norm Arkans said.

The steering committee working on the project has said it envisions five full-time instructors teaching evening classes, at first enrolling just 30 students.

The group has estimated start-up costs at \$2.25 million over three years.

"We're trying to get this thing going, and we want the state to show its commitment and support for it," said Sen. Bruce Dammeier, a Puyallup Republican who serves on the UW Tacoma advisory board and the budget-writing Ways and Means Committee.

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