

## Governor to help swear in Sal Mendoza today in Kennewick

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Sal Mendoza Jr.

Gov. Jay Inslee will take care of two pieces of business at one stop today in Kennewick.

The governor will help swear in Benton-Franklin Superior Court's newest judge, Sal Mendoza Jr., at 3:30 p.m., then sign a bill allowing for a seventh judicial position.

Both events are open to the public at the Benton County Justice Center, 7320 W. Quinault Ave.

Inslee announced last month the appointment of Mendoza, the first Latino judge to serve in the bicounty court.

Mendoza is replacing Judge Craig Matheson, who retired April 30 after serving 26 years on the bench. Matheson retired only four months into his four-year term.

Mendoza, a Kennewick attorney, is a 1990 Prosser High School graduate who went on to get his bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Washington and his law degree from the University of California, Los Angeles.

In order to keep his seat, Mendoza will have to run in an election later this year.

House Bill 1175, which created the seventh judgeship in Benton-Franklin Superior Court, was approved by the state Senate on April 15 by a vote of 47 for and one against. That came after House approval of 87-9.

Despite the likely approval, the actual seventh judge isn't expected to take the bench until 2014 at the earliest because of budget uncertainty in Benton and Franklin counties.

Officials say the growth of the Tri-Cities has put more demand on the court system in recent years, but no new judge positions have been added in a decade.

Superior Court judges are paid \$149,000 a year.

If approved, the larger Benton County is expected to pay \$54,900 annually for the judge, while Franklin County will pay \$19,500. The state picks up half of the judge's salary and all benefits.