

TRI-CITY HERALD

## Inslee signs bill creating new Benton-Franklin judgeship

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*Gov. Jay Inslee holds up House Bill 1175 after signing it into law Monday at Benton-Franklin Superior Court. The bill, which created the court's seventh judgeship, was approved April 15 by the state Senate. (RICHARD DICKIN/Tri-City Herald)*

Gov. Jay Inslee signed a bill Monday that paves the way to add another judicial position in Benton-Franklin Superior Court.

"There's been a sizable increase in population in these counties, which has resulted in more crime and civil action," Inslee told an audience gathered for the swearing in of new Judge Sal Mendoza Jr.

Now that House Bill 1175 has been signed, Benton and Franklin counties still need to find a way to pay for the judgeship. Officials have said the counties likely won't have a spot in their budgets until at least 2014, and possibly 2015.

Superior Court judges are paid \$149,000 a year. While the state picks up half of that plus benefits, the larger Benton County would have to pay an estimated \$54,900 a year, while Franklin County would pay \$19,500.

Paying for the judge will require approval from both county commissions, as well as the state Legislature.

Pat Austin, Superior Court administrator, said the court can avoid hiring new support people like bailiffs and court reporters by moving them around from other courts.

But Franklin County Clerk Mike Killian said that with another judge, he would need to add another person to his 10-member staff, which hasn't been increased in a decade.

"With the additional judge, it's going to create additional workload for the clerk's office," Killian said after Monday's ceremony.

Killian won't ask for the new person until after the new judge is appointed, he said. The job in his office would likely pay around \$30,000 a year and cost the county another \$10,000 in benefits.

Inslee told the Herald that while funding for the position wasn't provided in the bill, he is optimistic about what will happen.

"From what I'm advised, I think there's going to be a good situation to set this court up," he said.

When asked who he might appoint to join Mendoza as the seventh Superior Court Judge, Inslee said, "That's another day."

"It'll be a great judge," he said, laughing.

Inslee compared the situation the county now has with judges to the courthouse doors being locked for people who have been waiting years for their day in court.

"This is going to open up that door for people to get a fair measure of justice," he said.

"That's what folks deserve in this county."