

Guest Editorial: Don't Let Senate Republicans Pass a Budget That Undermines Our System of Justice

by [Christine Kilduff](#)

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Justices on the Washington State Supreme Court. Republicans in the state senate want to reduce funding for our high court—and the rest of our already underfunded court system—by \$9.5 million over the next two years. Don't let them. WASHINGTON STATE SUPREME COURT

For everyday citizens to have justice, we need courts that work.

Courts, judges, police officers, prosecutors—our system of justice needs all those vital organs of the law to function properly.

But because of cuts proposed by the Republican-controlled state senate, justice in every corner of Washington State is in danger.

The proposed senate budget starves our courts. It reduces court funding by \$9.5 million for the next two years, **an almost 45 percent reduction since 2009**. Under this proposal, court funding makes up .4 percent of the senate operating budget.

These cuts are not without casualties. Justice on a shoestring undermines our democracy and state constitution.

Who will get hurt? Everyday people. These cuts hurt kids and communities and curtail individual rights.

Consider our children. Two and a half years ago the Washington State Supreme Court said the legislature violated its constitutional duty to fully fund our schools. Then, in an

extraordinary and historic step, last September the court found the legislature in contempt for failing to make reasonable progress on a required funding plan.

The court stood up for our almost one million Washington students.

How did the senate respond to the supreme court watching out for the next generation? **By proposing a \$750,000+ cut to the supreme court itself.** That's the legislative equivalent of cutting someone off on I-5 at 85 miles per hour. It's disrespectful and harmful to our democracy.

Local trial courts will take the brunt of the damage if this year's senate cuts are approved. Every day, they handle thousands of cases in every county. They keep our streets safe, hold criminals and other bad actors accountable, and protect our constitutional rights. This new \$9.5 million cut to our court system would be devastating.

Funding for courts has already been cut in half since the global recession. Imagine having to cut your grocery bill in half when you've been clipping coupons, cooking from scratch, and consuming no-frills brands for years. You'd have to skip a meal, or even two, each day.

The house court budget stands in stark contrast to the senate's. It avoids these hurtful cuts and smartly invests an additional \$25 million dollars in the justice system. It keeps the public safe by making sure criminals are tried and put behind bars, protects individual rights by ensuring civil disputes are timely heard, and prioritizes critical technology upgrades so courts can run efficiently.

What makes the senate's choking of the courts **so incredibly dangerous** is the undermining of an entire branch of government. Our great democracy is comprised of three co-equal branches. We can't have checks and balances when an entire branch of government is crippled.

When our nation won its independence, a core belief was to establish justice for all, under the rule of law. That means independent judges and juries made of average citizens rather than puppets of an English king who ruled however he wanted.

True justice means being able to appeal the ruling of a court all the way up to the supreme court.

It means access to the courts without favor or fear, and regardless of power, wealth, or identity.

We can't have justice without properly funded courts.

The fair administration of justice is under fire. And it is everyday citizens who will get burned.

Instead of decimating an entire branch of government, **please tell your representatives in Olympia** to support the house budget, which makes sure every citizen has access to justice when they need it.

Rep. Christine Kilduff (D-University Place) is Vice-Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, served on the University Place School Board, and as an assistant attorney general, led a statewide team of litigators dedicated to reducing drunk driving.