

Local senators call for push against Supreme Court over education funding

By Mike Faulk

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August 21, 2015

OLYMPIA, Wash. — Three local senators are among the Republicans who released a letter today condemning the state Supreme Court's attempts to force the Legislature to spend more on education.

Last week the court announced it would fine the state \$100,000 a day after deciding lawmakers have failed to adequately pay to educate the state's 1 million school children.

Lawmakers have allocated billions of dollars toward public schools, but critics say that's not enough to meet the requirements in the state Constitution that education be the Legislature's "paramount duty."

Today, a majority of state Senate Republicans signed a letter alleging the court's decisions create "constitutional crises" by violating the roles laid out for the different branches of government by the state constitution. They include Sens. Curtis King, R-Yakima; Jim Honeyford, R-Sunnyside; and Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, whose 13th District includes part of northeast Yakima County.

The group of 19 senators who signed the letter includes Tim Sheldon, a Potlatch Democrat who caucuses with Republicans.

The senators state "our concerns with the order have nothing to do with the surface issue of education funding.

"It is because the court's order circumvents this process, that it represents a direct challenge to the legislative role within our state constitutional system," the senators wrote in a letter to other legislative leaders in the House and Senate.

The senators want other legislative leaders to develop "a range of political, legal and constitutional responses" to push back against the court.

The court decided in 2012 that state funding for education is not adequate, and laid the responsibility at the feet of the Legislature. Specifically, the justices said the state burdened local governments to come up with dollars to fund school districts to make up for inadequate state funding.

The court gave the Legislature until 2018 to adequately fund education, although there have been a myriad of opinions on just what might meet constitutional requirements. The court also demanded yearly progress reports and, to date, has found the Legislature's efforts severely lacking.