

September 2, 2025

MEMORANDUM

To: Public Safety Committee
From: Tamaso Johnson, Analyst
Subject: Council Bill 121064 – Judges Pro Tempore ORD

On September 9, 2025, the Public Safety Committee will discuss [Council Bill \(CB\) 121064](#), request legislation from the Mayor’s Office. This bill would authorize the Seattle Municipal Court to employ judges pro tempore who reside outside the City. This change would align the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) with 2025 changes to Washington State law on this subject.

This memorandum provides background information, describes the bill, and outlines next steps.

Background

Judges Pro Tempore

A judge pro tempore, or more commonly “pro tem” judge, is a judicial officer who serves in an interim or substitute capacity for an elected or appointed judge in circumstances where the judge cannot be present at a legal proceeding. Judicial absences due to illness, paid time off, or other duties necessitate the use of pro tem judges in order to maintain regular operations of a court. The Municipal Court recruits dedicated pro tem judges for this purpose, in addition to occasionally utilizing Court magistrates (appointed judicial officers who primarily handle infractions) as pro tem judges when other pro tem judges are not available. Using magistrates as pro tem judges has a negative impact on the Court infraction calendar, which can result in service reductions or delays that may reduce the quality of experience for Court users.

State Law Requirements

Washington State law governing municipal courts contains specific statutory provisions that apply only to cities with over 400,000 residents, which currently only affect the City of Seattle. Until recently, state law required pro tem judges appointed by the Seattle Municipal Court to reside within City limits—a requirement no other municipal court in the state was subject to.¹ During the 2025 session the Washington State legislature passed [House Bill 1112](#), which recently went into effect, repealing the city residency requirement for pro tem judges in cities with a population of more than 400,000. The Municipal Court has had challenges recruiting pro tem judges within the City in recent years and is hopeful that this state law change, and accompanying SMC change proposed in this ordinance, will increase recruitment of pro tem judges and help alleviate recent related judicial staffing challenges.

¹ [RCW 35.20.200](#)

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This bill would align the SMC with relevant changes made to the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) earlier this year, removing the City residency requirement for pro tem judges in Municipal Court. This bill, following amended state law, would require Municipal Court pro tem judges to be both eligible to vote in Washington State and be an attorney admitted to practice law in the state. This proposed change to the SMC is necessary to provide the Municipal Court with the authority to implement the recent state law change described in this memo. There is no fiscal impact associated with implementing this legislation.

Next steps

CB 121064 is scheduled for a second hearing and potential vote in the Public Safety Committee on September 23, 2025.

cc: Ben Noble, Director