

Key Features and Provisions - Impartial Justice Act

HB 1738 / SB 5912

Public Financing of Campaigns for Positions on the State Supreme Court

*This summary prepared by Washington Public Campaigns, 2-2-10.
Provisions and details subject to change.*

Summary:

This is a bill to establish a pilot program of optional public financing of campaigns for the Washington State Supreme Court, a.k.a. Judicial Elections Reform Act, or Impartial Justice Act.

The legislative intent is to reduce the likelihood or appearance of corruption or undue influence by private special interest campaign contributions, and to preserve the integrity of, and public confidence in, the state's highest court, by allowing candidates the option of financing their campaigns solely or primarily on public funding.

Qualifying for the program:

To qualify to participate in the program and receive public financing, candidates must:

- file an intent to participate and to abide by program requirements upon certification;
- as Qualifying Contributions, generate at least **\$41,055** (aggregate total, and indexed as twenty-five times the filing fee) from at least **500 contributors** who are natural persons and residents of Washington state, in amounts **at least \$10 but no more than \$400** (indexed as one-quarter of maximum campaign contributions allowed by state law)

Seed funds available during qualifying period:

Candidates may use personal funds up to \$3,200 plus up to one-quarter of the Qualifying Contributions they collect, as "seed funds" to generate the necessary Qualifying Contributions.

Campaign funds made available to participants (as specified in HB 1738 and SB 5912):

Amounts of campaign grants will be set by rule, based on the number of candidates filing for office.

Primary election: Not to exceed 100 times the filing fee (= \$164,221)

For uncontested races, the grant is 4 times the filing fee (= \$6,569), plus all QC's collected.

General election campaign: Base grant for primary winners, 125 times the filing fee (= \$205,276).

Rescue funds provided; upper limit specified; up to 75% available in primary:

Supplemental "rescue funds" are provided, up to a set upper limit (500 times filing fee overall), to match overspending by opponents or to match IE spending by 527s, etc.

Up to 75 percent of maximum rescue funds may be claimed and used in the primary race - if triggered as described - or 100 percent of such rescue funds if the publicly-financed candidate has only one opponent.

Funding source(s):

This program is proposed to be funded through a \$3 surcharge on selected court filing fees. Other sources as may be determined or authorized, including voluntary contributions. The program is authorized to begin, once at least \$1 million has been received and deposited into the Court Elections Reform Act fund.