



Fiscal Note

Fiscal Services Division



[HF 2706](#) – Magistrates and Judicial Officer Compensation (LSB5542HV.1)
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Fiscal Note Version – As amended and passed by the House

Description

[House File 2706](#) relates to judicial officers, including magistrate appointments, senior magistrates, and judicial officer compensation. The Bill has three divisions.

Division I — Magistrate Appointment in Judicial Election Districts

Description

Division I transitions magistrate appointments from a county-based system to a judicial election district-based system and makes conforming changes to the Iowa Code. Provisions include:

- Replaces the statutory requirement of 206 magistrates in Iowa Code section [602.6401](#) with a case-related workload formula established by the Iowa Supreme Court.
- Eliminates the requirement that each county has at least one resident magistrate.
- Modifies the composition and duties of magistrate appointing commissions in Iowa Code sections [602.6501](#), [602.6502](#), [602.6503](#), and [602.6504](#). Judicial election district magistrate appointing commissions would replace county commissions, reducing the 99 county appointing commissions to 14 judicial election district appointing commissions.
- Amends the commencement of the term of office of a magistrate to August 1, 2027.
- Requires the judicial election district magistrate appointing commission to prioritize applicants who served or are serving as magistrates for the term immediately preceding August 1, 2027. If the number of vacancies equals or exceeds the number of prioritized applicants, all prioritized applicants shall be appointed. If the vacancies are fewer than prioritized applicants, only prioritized applicants shall be appointed. This requirement is repealed July 31, 2031.
- Allows temporary reassignment of magistrates across counties. This authority is repealed August 1, 2027.
- Repeals Iowa Code section [602.6402](#) permitting the appointment of additional magistrates in certain counties.

Under this Bill, judicial election district magistrate appointing commissions would be comprised of a district court judge who is designated by the chief judge of the judicial district; one appointee from each county in the judicial election district appointed by the board of supervisors; and attorney members, equal to one less than the number of county appointees, selected by attorneys residing in, or counties contiguous to, the election district.

Authorization to temporarily reassign magistrates across counties is effective upon enactment, while all other provisions in Division I are effective November 1, 2026.

Background

Under Iowa Code section 602.6401, each county must have at least one resident magistrate for a total of up to 206 magistrates across the State. Magistrates are appointed by county-based appointing commissions, comprised of the following members: a district court judge who is designated by the chief judge of the judicial district, up to three nonlawyer

members appointed by the board of supervisors, and up to two lawyers elected by the attorneys in the county.

Assumptions

- Statutory requirements were in place prior to the availability of court resources like electronic search warrants and electronic court proceedings.
- Judicial election districts will replace county-level operations without requiring an increase in commission activity statewide.
- Commission members continue to be reimbursed by their resident county for actual and necessary expenses.
- Magistrates are currently paid approximately \$66,000 in annual salary and benefits.
- The estimated annual information technology (IT) operational cost per magistrate is approximately \$4,600, which includes the cost of a laptop, software, hardware, security, and IT support.
- There is an estimated 1.5% rate of vacancy for magistrate positions.
- There are currently 138 magistrates. The Judicial Branch estimates that, after full implementation of the workload-based magistrate allocation formula, the range will be between 81 and 90 active magistrates serving the districts.

Fiscal Impact

Division I is estimated to decrease annual costs between \$2.0 million and \$2.8 million beginning in FY 2028 by reducing magistrate positions. There may be a minimal fiscal impact on counties as each commission will cover a larger geographic area, and travel reimbursement costs may increase for commission members.

Division II — Senior Magistrates

Description

Division II establishes a senior magistrate program, allowing certain retired magistrates to serve on a limited basis. Under the Division, a magistrate who retires on or after the effective date of the legislation and meets age and service requirements may apply to become a senior magistrate. Appointments are made at the discretion of the Iowa Supreme Court. The Division amends 2025 Iowa Acts, chapter [158](#) (FY 2026 Judicial Branch Appropriations Act), to add the annual salary rate of each senior magistrate of \$4,234.

Once appointed to a two-year term, with the possibility of reappointment, a senior magistrate serves part-time, up to five weeks per year, performing judicial duties as assigned. A senior magistrate may serve until reaching the mandatory retirement age. A senior magistrate may continue to practice law. Senior magistrates will be paid at the rate set by the General Assembly, are eligible for expense reimbursement, and may participate in the State-provided health insurance system at the rate of actively serving magistrates.

Background

Currently, the Iowa Code allows for senior judges but does not provide for senior magistrates.

Assumptions

- Only a portion of retired magistrates eligible for appointments will become senior magistrates.
- The number of senior magistrates that will be hired is unknown.

Fiscal Impact

The cost of Division II is unknown and depends on the number of senior magistrates receiving compensation, expense reimbursement, and health insurance coverage. Total costs will be based on the number of senior magistrates, but compensation costs will be significantly lower than an active magistrate salary.

Division III — Judicial Officer Salaries

Description

Division III increases judicial officer salaries by 5.0%, excluding magistrates, based on salary rates for judicial officers for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2026. The Division also increases the salary rate for magistrates to 40.0% of the salary of a district associate judge based on salary rates for judicial officers for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2026.

Division III takes effect on June 18, 2027 (FY 2028).

Background

Judicial salaries are determined by the General Assembly under Iowa Code section [602.1501](#) and funded annually by a General Fund appropriation. In FY 2026, the Judicial Branch received \$1.7 million for operations that included a 2.5% increase in salary for all judges and magistrates. The FY 2026 current salary for a magistrate is \$46,621, with approximately \$19,000 in benefits, for a total of approximately \$66,000 annually. The estimated FY 2026 salary for a district associate judge is \$151,000.

Assumptions

- Salary increases are based on the most recent salaries established in the FY 2026 Judicial Branch Appropriations Act.
- The number of filled positions used to estimate future costs is based on currently filled positions.
- The reduction in magistrate positions may offset increased salaries per position, but this is unknown.
- The estimated annual salary and benefits for FY 2028 for one magistrate is \$83,000.

Fiscal Impact

Division III of the Bill is estimated to cost approximately \$2.5 million in FY 2028, based on the current salary rates for judicial officers in FY 2026. The actual cost will be impacted by salary levels in effect in FY 2027 and the potential change in magistrate allocations within the districts.

Sources

Judicial Branch
Legislative Services Agency calculations

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The Fiscal Note for this Bill was prepared pursuant to [Joint Rule 17](#) and the Iowa Code. Data used in developing this Fiscal Note is available from the Fiscal Services Division of the Legislative Services Agency upon request.
