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Senator Jacque Requests New Circuit Court Judgeships Be Allocated to Counties in Greatest Need

(Madison, WI) Senator André Jacque (R – De Pere) today advocated for Wisconsin's 12 newly approved circuit court branches to be allocated to counties based on demonstrated need, as indicated by the Wisconsin Court System's weighted caseload analysis measurement. **Such a move would include approval of sorely needed additional judgeships in Calumet and Manitowoc Counties within the next three years.** The request follows this afternoon's enactment of Wisconsin Act 184, which was modeled after Senate Bill 148, authored by Senator André Jacque at the request of the Chief Judges of Wisconsin Circuit Courts. Senator Jacque attended the bill signing along with Calumet County Chief Judge Jeffrey Froehlich and Manitowoc County Chief Judge Robert DeWane.

The original legislation authored by Senator Jacque would have distributed the additional judgeships to those counties objectively shown as having the greatest need (Adams, Calumet, Clark, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson, Langlade, Manitowoc, Marathon, Sawyer, Vilas, and Waushara). The legislation was modified before passage to instead allow the Director of State Courts to select the counties receiving additional circuit court branches, opening the door to other considerations for allocation.

As an example of the current imbalance, Calumet County has the largest population per judge of any circuit in Wisconsin. The addition of a second judge would still place the population per judge at above the statewide average. In fact, eleven of the circuits with a lower population than Calumet County have two judges, and two lesser-populated counties have three judges. Manitowoc County's weighted caseload is similarly reaching critical levels at an accelerating rate.

In response, Senator Jacque made the following statement:

“Inadequate judicial capacity to handle cases leads to prolonged delays in the justice system for the disposition of cases, drawing out the court process in a way that can hinder opportunities for defendants to get treatment, victims to find closure, and judges to participate in programs like treatment courts. Adjustments to the distribution of county circuit courts take decades to achieve- it is essential that we get this right, and I am optimistic that the Director of State Courts can avoid the temptation of playing favorites.”

Senator André Jacque represents Northeast Wisconsin's First Senate District, consisting of Door and Kewaunee Counties and portions of Brown, Calumet, Manitowoc, and Outagamie counties.

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