
Follow the **latest stories and blog updates** of politics across the region or check out our **national politics** coverage.

Politics Northwest

The Seattle Times political team explores national, state and local politics.

July 18, 2011 at 4:45 PM

Ferguson restriction for pretrial defendants appears to have the votes

Posted by Bob Young

After some legislative maneuvering, a controversial proposal by Metropolitan King County Council member Bob Ferguson to restrict alternatives to incarceration for some pretrial defendants appears on a path to approval.

Ferguson's proposal would prohibit defendants with a record of violent crime from being released into jail alternatives that often include daily monitoring, work training and substance-abuse programs.

King County Superior Court judges strongly oppose the proposal because they would lose discretion in individual cases. Judges argue it would also increase jail populations and have a "disparate" impact on economic and racial minorities.

Judges weren't the only obstacle facing Ferguson. He didn't have the votes needed to get the proposal out of the council's law and justice committee, which he chairs. Ferguson and fellow committee member Reagan Dunn support the legislation; they are both running for state attorney general next year. Larry Gossett, Kathy Lambert and Joe McDermott have spoken against it.

So Ferguson asked the full nine-member council on Monday to "relieve" the committee of the legislation and send it directly to the full council.

Gossett, Lambert and McDermott voted against the move, arguing the legislation was flawed and unnecessary. But Ferguson, Dunn, Jane Hague, Julia Patterson and Pete von Reichbauer voted to have the full council take up the issue next week. Councilmember Larry Phillips stepped out during the vote, but when he returned to chambers said he would have voted with the majority.

The five votes to send the proposal to the full council could be seen as a proxy vote to pass the legislation itself. It remains to be seen if a robust debate will occur next week or if the seemingly outnumbered opponents (and judges) will quietly object.