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Date: (Filing No. S- )

**JUDICIARY**

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**STATE OF MAINE  
SENATE  
131ST LEGISLATURE  
FIRST SPECIAL SESSION**

COMMITTEE AMENDMENT “ ” to S.P. 587, L.D. 1468, “An Act to Ensure Equal Treatment by the Law Court by Requiring 7 Justices to Decide All Cases”

Amend the bill by striking out the title and substituting the following:

**'An Act to Ensure Equal Treatment by the Law Court'**

Amend the bill by striking out all of sections 2 to 4 and inserting the following:

'Sec. 2. 4 MRSA §51, as amended by PL 2007, c. 518, §1, is further amended to read:

**§51. Constitution of court; concurrence required**

~~When~~ Except as provided in this section, when sitting as a Law Court to determine questions of law arising in any civil or criminal action or proceeding, the Supreme Judicial Court Law Court must be composed as provided by rules adopted by that court and of the Chief Justice and 6 associate justices of the Supreme Judicial Court. The Law Court shall hear and determine such questions by the concurrence of a majority of the justices sitting and qualified to act.

If, at any point in time prior to the issuance of a final judgment in any civil or criminal action or proceeding before the Law Court, the Chief Justice or any of the 6 associate justices of the Supreme Judicial Court are unavailable to sit or unqualified to act on the questions of law arising in the action or proceeding, the clerk of the Law Court shall notify the parties in writing of the reason that the justice will not participate on the Law Court panel.

If, at any point in time prior to the issuance of a final judgment in any civil or criminal action or proceeding before the Law Court, fewer than 5 justices of the Supreme Judicial Court are available to sit and qualified to act on the questions of law arising in the action or proceeding, the clerk of the Law Court shall randomly assign, from the pool of all Active Retired Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court appointed under section 6, a sufficient number of Active Retired Justices to sit on the panel so that the Law Court panel is composed of a total of 5 justices. If an insufficient number of justices and Active Retired

**COMMITTEE AMENDMENT**

1 Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court is available to sit and qualified to act on the questions  
2 of law arising in any civil or criminal action or proceeding, the decision of the lower court  
3 must be deemed to have been affirmed.

4 The designation of an Active Retired Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court to sit on a  
5 panel of the Law Court must be docketed in the record of the civil or criminal action or  
6 proceeding to which the justice has been assigned.

7 The Supreme Judicial Court shall adopt rules necessary to carry out the requirements  
8 of this section.'

9 **Sec. 3. Appropriations and allocations.** The following appropriations and  
10 allocations are made.

11 **JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT**

12 **Courts - Supreme, Superior and District 0063**

13 Initiative: Provides ongoing funding for per diem payments to Active Retired Justices  
14 assigned to sit on Law Court panels.

15 <b>GENERAL FUND</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25</b>
16 Personal Services	\$11,750	\$15,667
17		
18 GENERAL FUND TOTAL	<u>\$11,750</u>	<u>\$15,667</u>

19 '  
20 Amend the bill by relettering or renumbering any nonconsecutive Part letter or section  
21 number to read consecutively.

22 **SUMMARY**

23 Like the bill, this amendment, which is a minority report of the committee, requires  
24 that, when the Supreme Judicial Court is sitting as a Law Court to determine questions of  
25 law arising in any civil or criminal action or proceeding, the case must be decided by the  
26 Chief Justice and all 6 associate justices of the Supreme Judicial Court if they are available  
27 to sit and qualified to act on the action or proceeding.

28 Unlike the bill, the amendment:

29 1. Directs that, if the Chief Justice or any of the associate justices of the Supreme  
30 Judicial Court is unavailable or unqualified to act on the action or proceeding, the clerk of  
31 the Law Court is required to notify the parties in writing of the reason that the justice will  
32 not participate on the Law Court panel;

33 2. Directs that, if fewer than 5 justices are available to sit and qualified to act, the clerk  
34 of the Law Court is required to randomly assign a sufficient number of Active Retired  
35 Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court to serve on the Law Court panel to ensure that the  
36 panel is composed of 5 justices; and

37 3. Provides that, if an insufficient number of justices and Active Retired Justices of  
38 the Supreme Judicial Court is available to sit and qualified to act on the questions of law  
39 arising in any civil or criminal action or proceeding before the Law Court, the decision of  
40 the lower court must be deemed to have been affirmed.

1           The amendment also changes the bill title and adds an appropriations and allocations  
2 section.

3

**FISCAL NOTE REQUIRED**

4

**(See attached)**