

[Washington Legislature approves new courthouse protections](#)

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The Legislature has approved a [bipartisan measure](#) proposed by Attorney General Bob Ferguson to extend current courthouse protections to all residents accessing the courts.

"I'd like to thank all the legislators who voted to add new protections for the thousands of jurors, crime victims, defendants and family members across our state who access Washington courts," Ferguson said. "People should feel safe when they access the courts—no matter whether they are a judge or a juror." Ferguson recognized the measure's prime sponsor, [Sen. Adam Kline](#), D-Seattle, for sponsoring the bill and helping it move forward.

"Courthouses by their very nature attract conflict—and angry, disgruntled and desperate people often resort to violence when faced with conflict," Kline said. "People should feel safe when they enter the halls of justice." Senate Floor Leader and sponsor of the measure, Sen. [Joe Fain](#), R-Auburn, played an important role in moving this legislation forward as well, Ferguson said. Earlier this year, a man assaulted a plainclothes detective at the Kent courthouse after the detective asked him to stop intimidating witnesses. The assailant claimed he did not know he was assaulting a detective. He just thought he was attacking "some guy in a suit."

"It shouldn't matter if you're a detective, judge or a family member supporting a crime victim. Everyone who accesses our courts should be protected from violence," said Fain, whose 47th District includes Kent. "This is a common-sense measure designed to safeguard those taking part in our judicial process, which is part of the foundation of our society and should be safe for all."

Senate Bill 5484 extends protections currently granted to some courthouse, legal and law enforcement personnel to all visitors to Washington courthouses. The bill: Increases the penalty for misdemeanor assault in and around a courthouse to a felony — regardless of the victim; and Makes committing a felony in and around a courthouse — regardless of the victim — an aggravating factor for a judge to consider during sentencing.

It garnered wide support from law enforcement, prosecutors and victims' advocates. SB 5484 was amended in the House of Representatives to clarify exactly when and where the protections apply and to increase notice to the public. "Public order is founded on the rule of law," said [Rep. Roger Goodman](#) (D-Kirkland), prime sponsor of the House version of the bill and chair of the House Public Safety Committee. "Our courthouses are sanctuaries of the rule of law and must therefore be kept safe and secure for our citizens who seek justice there. This new measure will ensure that anyone violating the sanctity of the courthouse will be properly held accountable." "As a former judge, I've seen firsthand the anxiety and stress people experience when they must testify in a criminal case or engage in a contested small-claims case," said Sen. [Mike Padden \(R-Spokane Valley\)](#), chair of the Senate Law and Justice

Committee. "I'm proud we were able to work in a bi-partisan manner to protect everyone who accesses our courts." "As a lawyer who has spent significant time in courthouses around the state, I know it is not easy to help regular people feel comfortable in a court of law," said Sen. [David Frockt \(D-Seattle\)](#), another key sponsor of the bill. "This bill is an important step toward reassuring these people and others they will be safe." The measure is sponsored by Sens. Kline, Frockt, [Kevin Ranker \(D-Orcas Island\)](#), [Christine Rolfes, D- Bainbridge Island](#), Padden, Fain and [Jeanne Kohl-Welles \(D-Belltown\)](#).

It originally passed the Senate 40-9. It was amended in the House of Representatives and passed 83-10 with five excused. The Senate agreed to the amendments and passed the bill 35-9 with five excused. ESB 5484 was delivered to the Governor on Sunday. The Governor has 20 days after adjournment to act. After this deadline, if he has not signed the bill, it will become law without his signature.