



For Immediate Release

Date: March 10, 2020

Re: HB300 Justice Court Amendments Change Advances to the Senate

HB 300, sponsored by Rep. Keven Stratton allows cases that have been sent to the County Attorney for prosecution—that would have been filed in District Court and likely pled down to a Misdemeanor B—to be filed in the County Justice Court.

“These amendments in HB300 are an opportunity to reduce backlogs in the District Court calendars for a low risk Class A misdemeanor case that likely will receive a plea bargain instead of going through 3 to 6 months in the processes of the District Courts, only to be reduced to a Class B misdemeanor anyway. By using the County Justice Court option and filing these as Class B misdemeanors, we can make better use of court resources, shorten the resolution of these matters, and direct available resources to defendants to help them improve their lives.” said David Leavitt, Utah County Attorney.

Leavitt continued, “It makes better use of taxpayer funds and we know that our County Justice Court has the capacity to manage the caseloads and help more people, sooner.”

This bill has no effect on Law Enforcement or upon our Municipal Courts.

Representative Keven Stratton stated, “This is an important small adjustment that could help the disposition of many cases that don’t need the time and resources of the District Courts. It puts one more tool in the toolbox of our County Prosecutors, to resolve cases effectively. That makes more efficient usage of taxpayer dollars.”

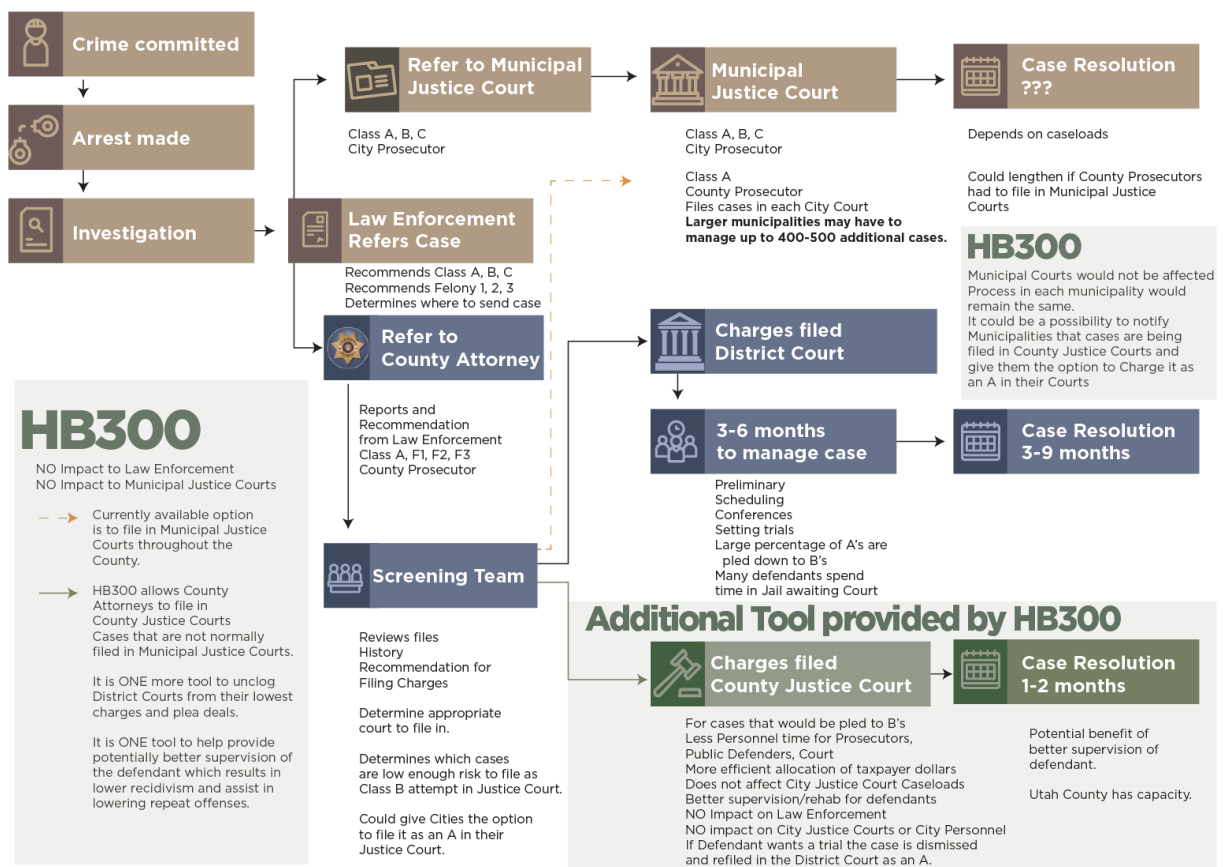
“As the law currently reads, our office could file these Misdemeanors as Bs in each city's Municipal Justice Court, but that action could overwhelm the resources of the Municipal Court to manage these additional case loads and decrease the efficiencies of our office to man multiple courtrooms.” said Leavitt.

This proposes that only for these specific cases the addition of the County Justice Court option be included as an additional tool in HB300. The option will not be given to high-risk offenders or those with compounded charging that would include a felony.

The measure was heard in the House Judiciary Committee. It was reviewed by the Utah League of Cities and Towns who have taken a neutral stance and the Utah Statewide Association of Prosecutors & Public Attorneys (SWAP) who have supported the concept.

The vote was unanimous, with one member absent from the House Judiciary Committee. The bill was passed in the House 66-1-8. It next moved to the Senate Judiciary Committee and was heard there, along with public comment. The Senate Judiciary Committee passed the measure 7-0-1 and sent it to the Senate for vote.

Utah County had about 5,000 cases in 2018. 65% were low risk crimes/misdemeanors.
 A significant number of those 2,000 could be sent to Justice Courts.



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For more information or for interview requests, please contact:

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