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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Left Covering the Cost, Counties File Lawsuit Against the State of Washington

*The Washington State Association of Counties along with Kittitas, Snohomish, and Whitman Counties
Want the State to Pay for State Mandated Services*

Olympia, WA (December 11, 2019) - Today, the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC), filed a lawsuit against the State of Washington in King County Superior Court. WSAC, along with Kittitas, Snohomish, and Whitman Counties are seeking financial relief for all of Washington's 39 counties from legislation (SB 5472). The legislation was passed by the Washington State Legislature in 2017 and mandated counties increase the number of ballot drop boxes without providing funding.

The legislature's failure to provide funding has left counties with a bill of over \$1 million to install the ballot drop boxes. There has been no funding given to counties to cover the cost. Additionally, counties must also pay the operational cost to service the additional ballot drop boxes. Those costs are estimated to be more than \$77,000 for Snohomish County in 2020 alone which cover personnel to empty the ballot drop boxes, transportation costs, as well as, installation and maintenance.

As the legislature is fully aware, county budgets remain razor-thin due to the one percent property tax cap. Counties rely heavily on property tax revenue, which accounts for 60% of total tax revenue for a county's general fund.

With limited resources and new mandates, counties are faced with either not complying with the law or to making cuts to other critical services and staff. Whitman County anticipates the total cost of complying with the law to cost over \$100,000. "Whitman County raised property rates this year by our statutory limit of one percent, which generated \$56,000 in new revenue," said Whitman County Commissioner, Michael Largent. Not even enough to cover the cost of implementing this new state requirement.

"Counties are committed to expanding access to voting, and we believe that the legislature acted in good faith; however, they failed to acknowledge the actual cost of implementation. We are asking the court to provide the financial relief needed to counties so that additional ballot drop boxes can be installed before the 2020 presidential election," said Eric Johnson, WSAC Executive Director.

For additional information or questions, please contact WSAC Executive Director Eric Johnson, at (360) 481-2241 or ejohnson@wsac.org.

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About Washington State Association of Counties

Created in 1906, the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) is a voluntary, non-profit association serving all of Washington's 39 counties. WSAC members include elected county commissioners, council members, and executives from each county. WSAC is working to help members address the ongoing budget shortfalls facing counties due to revenue limitations and rising expenses. Learn more about WSAC at www.wsac.org.