



**NEWS ADVISORY
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**Seattle Municipal Court Launches SMC Connected,
Expands Needs-Based Sentencing and Court Engaged Diversion Opportunities**

Seattle Municipal Court (SMC) will soon expand needs-based sentencing and increase opportunities for referral to court engaged diversion programs with the launch of **SMC Connected**. These non-traditional sentencing options and programs expand on 11 years of success with Seattle Community Court, a community involved justice initiative that helps individuals who repeatedly commit low-level crimes access critical social services while working to restore the harm their actions caused the community, without serving time in jail. Needs-based sentencing and court engaged diversion further complement SMC's alternatives to confinement and pre-trial services programs. **SMC Connected, Community Needs-Based Court Engaged Diversion**, will launch in January 2017.

"Needs-based sentencing allows judges to address low-level crimes while supporting positive outcomes for the community and the individual" said Presiding Judge Karen Donohue. "Recognizing that unmet, complex social needs often cause individuals to intersect with the criminal justice system, the Court continues to increase partnerships with community service providers through our Court Resource Center to address these issues while increasing an individual's opportunity for future success."

At sentencing, SMC judges may elect to impose a "needs-based" sentence by referring the individual to participate in a needs assessment. The assessment provides the judge with additional considerations including recommended treatment and social service referrals along with restorative sentencing options. Rather than imposing jail time or a financial penalty for low-level crimes, the judge may impose a deferred sentence, under which the individual must perform community service and participate in social service opportunities to address their underlying needs. Upon completion of these obligations, the individual's case will be dismissed. While restoring harm caused to the community, a deferred sentence also preserves an individual's opportunity for future success by not adding a criminal conviction to their record. A single criminal conviction may have significant impacts on an individual's future success including impacting their ability to secure housing, employment, public benefits, and immigration status.

In coordination with the Seattle City Attorney's Office and the Court Resource Center (CRC), increased court engaged diversion opportunities will also be offered. Pre-filing diversion will divert individuals charged with certain criminal offenses from the traditional criminal justice system before a case is even filed. Instead, a restorative justice approach will be used to connect the individual with needed services through the CRC while they work to restore the

harm they caused the community. By not filing the charge, the crime stays off the individual's record, preserving opportunity for their future success.

Pre-trial diversion will also continue to be offered at the discretion of the Seattle City Attorney's Office to individuals who do not have a significant criminal history and who are charged with certain criminal offenses. This program requires the individual to complete a specific set of requirements including accessing services and restoring harm. Upon successful completion of these requirements, the charges will be dismissed. Pre-trial diversion at SMC currently has close to a 90% success rate in individuals completing their obligations and resulting in a dismissed case.

SMC has implemented significant pretrial release alternatives to support positive defendant outcomes and reduce the jail population. Personal Recognizance (PR) Screeners meet with individuals in the jail within a few hours of booking to determine if they may be released before arraignment, the first hearing where an individual is formally charged.

The Court's Day Reporting program provides an alternative to confinement for individuals accused of low-level crimes who do not pose any risk to public safety. Individuals in Day Reporting are required to report daily to a probation employee. Currently, we have 115 pretrial participants and 45 post sentence participants in Day Reporting.

Day Reporting is co-located with our Court Resource Center (CRC). The CRC houses several service providers who offer direct assistance within a single courthouse location for critical needs including: homelessness, mental illness, addiction, basic needs (food, clothing, financial assistance), and other support services including library access and job readiness.

Electronic monitoring, work crew and community service are also offered to some individuals. Alternatives to jail have substantially reduced the City's jail expenditures and created opportunities for individuals to address underlying needs which lead to criminal behavior.

Over the next few months, SMC will finalize court and program processes to support **SMC Connected** with a planned launch in January 2017.

About Seattle Municipal Court

The Seattle Municipal Court provides a forum to resolve alleged violations of the law in a respectful, independent and impartial manner. Seattle Municipal Court processes more cases than any other municipal court in the State of Washington with seven elected Judges and five appointed Magistrates. The Court adjudicates misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor crimes, infractions, and civil violations authorized under the Seattle Municipal Code and certain Revised Code of Washington statutes. For more information visit: www.seattle.gov/courts.