

Seattle Municipal Court

Fred Bonner, Presiding Judge

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Department Description

The Municipal Court of Seattle is the largest limited jurisdiction court in Washington. The court is authorized by the State of Washington to handle all violations of the Seattle Municipal Code. Cases heard by the Court's judges and magistrates include: criminal offenses, such as domestic violence, driving under the influence (DUI), shoplifting, and trespass;

traffic infractions, such as speeding, red light violations, or failure to yield; parking tickets; and other offenses including jaywalking, drinking in public, dog leash violations, and littering.

In addition, the Court works with community organizations to develop and initiate programs to make it easier for citizens with suspended driver's licenses to regain their licenses, including a special driving court one night per week. The probation staff monitors defendant compliance with court-ordered conditions, assesses the treatment needs of defendants, and helps direct defendants to resources that will help them live successfully in the community. Work crews and electronic home monitoring are used as alternatives to jail sentencing. The Mental Health Court, established in 1999, is a defendant-based program and is nationally recognized for serving misdemeanor offenders who are mentally ill or developmentally disabled.

Policy and Program Changes

The 2003 Adopted and 2004 Endorsed Budget for the Seattle Municipal Court reduces the Municipal Court bench from ten to eight judges. The number of misdemeanor cases filed in Seattle Municipal Court has declined steadily over the last ten years. Municipal Court officials have recognized this decline by reducing the number of judges. In addition, though the magistrate caseload has not declined, with business process improvements, the Court is able to reduce the number of magistrates and continue its focus on mandated functions. Other staffing reductions result from the automation and redistribution of human resources, finance support, and collections functions. In addition, the move of all court units to the new Seattle Justice Center in November, 2002, allows for efficiencies in administrative and courtroom staffing because of building configurations.

Two positions that support the Court's ongoing efforts to reduce recidivism and the number of hearings required to process a case are being converted from temporary to permanent. One position, the re-licensing ombudsperson, assists drivers with suspended licenses get their licenses back. The other position makes reminder phone calls to individuals prior to their first appearance before the Court. These calls have reduced the number of failure-to-appear warrants issued by SMC judges. Lastly, one administrative position is added to accommodate increases in walk-in and phone traffic that may result from the elimination of the Misdemeanor Warrants Unit in the Seattle Police Department.

City Council Budget Changes and Provisos

The City Council adopted the Mayor's 2003-2004 Proposed Budget with some minor amendments.

Municipal Court

Resources	Summit Code	2001 Actual	2002 Adopted	2003 Adopted	2004 Endorsed
Court Administration Budget Control Level	M3000	4,617,252	4,379,520	4,394,506	4,512,367
Court Compliance Budget Control Level	M4000	3,986,246	4,233,122	4,272,533	4,416,414
Court Operations Budget Control Level	M2000	11,027,826	10,878,448	10,782,153	11,152,095
Department Total		19,631,324	19,491,090	19,449,192	20,080,876
Department Full-time Equivalents Total*		255.69	255.69	227.85	227.35

*The department FTE total is provided for information only. All authorized positions are listed in Appendix A.

Selected Mid-year Performance Measures

The Court is seeking to improve public trust and confidence through its programs and processes. It will do this by making the court process more understandable, and by providing services that benefit the community.

Reduce Failure to Appear (FTA) rates on the intake calendars by placing reminder calls to defendants. The baseline for this measure, established prior to implementation of reduction strategies, is 47% of defendants failing to appear for court.

2001 Year End Actuals: 43% FTA

2002 Midyear Actuals: 41% FTA

2002 Year End Projection: 38% FTA

Court Compliance will work to enhance compliance with court orders, and provide meaningful alternatives to confinement.

Increase number of individuals on Electronic Home Monitoring (EHM) per month.

2001 Year End Actuals: 26

2002 Midyear Actuals: 33

2002 Year End Projection: 40

Court Administrator and Court Support Services

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the Court Administrator and Court Support Services program is to provide administrative controls, develop and provide strategic direction, establish structure and provide a consistent approach for decision-making, and provide policy and program development.

Program Summary

Eliminate the community-involved justice coordinator in July 2003, by which time contracts with social service agencies that provide services in the new Justice Center will be in place. Re-focus community-involved justice efforts on program development and implementation, using existing probation staff and concentrating efforts on treatment and defendant compliance.

Reduce administrative staff through automation and redistribution of human resources and finance support functions. Through the use of web-based technology, interpreters can schedule and track their hours in court, allowing for the elimination of an accounting position. Automation of training reports and redistribution of training functions allow existing human resources staff to absorb the remaining workload of the training and education coordinator.

Eliminate a vacant information technology position dedicated to the procurement and development of new systems, which cannot be undertaken at this time. Restoration of this position will be sought when funds are available to replace the Court's technology system, the Municipal Court Information System (MCIS). Other savings come from electronic distribution of reports, saving printing costs, and through a delay in purchasing hardware and software.

Resources	2001 Actual	2002 Adopted	2003 Adopted	2004 Endorsed
General Subfund	4,617,252	4,379,520	4,394,506	4,512,367
Total	4,617,252	4,379,520	4,394,506	4,512,367
Full-time Equivalents Total*	42.50	42.50	37.50	37.00

**The program FTE total is provided for information only. All authorized positions are listed in Appendix A.*

Municipal Court

Court Compliance

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the Court Compliance program is to help defendants understand the Court's expectations and to assist them in successfully complying with court orders.

Program Summary

Convert the temporary re-licensing ombudsperson to a permanent position using existing funds. The ombudsperson provides re-licensing education services to drivers with suspended licenses. In tandem with Operation Impound, which impounds the vehicles of individuals accused of driving with a suspended license in the City; the re-licensing program reduces the incidence of driving without a license within the City and, therefore, also drives down the recidivism associated with this crime.

Streamline functions of the Revenue Recovery and Collections Units to capture efficiencies and reduce five administrative positions. Realize efficiencies in probation resulting from the move of all staff into the Justice Center from two separate locations, which required each to have separate clerical support.

Eliminate several part-time positions and increase other part-time positions to full-time to create efficiencies in staffing.

Resources	2001 Actual	2002 Adopted	2003 Adopted	2004 Endorsed
General Subfund	3,986,246	4,233,122	4,272,533	4,416,414
Total	3,986,246	4,233,122	4,272,533	4,416,414
Full-time Equivalents Total*	56.85	56.85	51.35	51.35

**The program FTE total is provided for information only. All authorized positions are listed in Appendix A.*

Court Proceedings

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the Court Proceedings program is to hold hearings and address all legal requirements for defendants and others who come before the Court. Some proceedings are held in a formal courtroom and others in magistrate offices with the goal of providing timely resolution of alleged violations of City ordinances and misdemeanor crimes committed within the City of Seattle limits.

Program Summary

Eliminate two judges, a magistrate, associated support positions, and incidental expenditures such as judicial training due to decreases in criminal case filings in Seattle Municipal Court. As part of the Court's change in case scheduling to accommodate the reduction in judicial positions, eliminate funding for holiday arraignments.

Add two administrative support positions: one to accommodate increases in customer service workload that may result from the elimination of the Misdemeanor Warrants Unit in the Police Department and another to coordinate the movement of the City's misdemeanor jail population.

Upgrade administrative positions in the Court Services Unit to the uniform classification of Court Clerk. Due to the configuration of the Justice Center courtrooms and the efficiencies created by having all clerk functions in the courtroom, eliminate several administrative clerk positions previously needed in the Public Safety Building.

Eliminate several administrative positions in Public Services and Infractions Operations. While some of the workload of these positions is absorbed by staff in other sections and automation, citizens may experience longer phone center waits and slower correspondence response times. Additionally, a backlog in infraction citation data entry may occur.

Resources	2001 Actual	2002 Adopted	2003 Adopted	2004 Endorsed
General Subfund	11,027,826	10,878,448	10,782,153	11,152,095
Total	11,027,826	10,878,448	10,782,153	11,152,095
Full-time Equivalent Total*	156.34	156.34	139.00	139.00

**The program FTE total is provided for information only. All authorized positions are listed in Appendix A.*