

Seattle Municipal Court

Department Information Line: (206) 684-5600
On the Web at: <http://www.seattle.gov/courts/>



Judicial Branch Overview

The Seattle Municipal Court processes more cases than any other municipal court in the State of Washington. Seattle Municipal Court is authorized by the State of Washington and the Seattle Municipal Code to adjudicate misdemeanors, gross misdemeanors, infractions (e.g., traffic infractions, parking violations, and other infractions), and civil violations related to building and zoning offenses.

The Seattle Municipal Court is committed to excellence in providing fair, accessible, and timely resolution of alleged violations of the Seattle Municipal Code in an atmosphere of respect for the public, employees, and other

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government entities. The Seattle Municipal Court values and recognizes its employees. The Municipal Court of Seattle is a contributing partner working toward a safe and vital community.

By working with community organizations, the Court has increased access for residents and enhanced compliance with court-ordered conditions. Court Probation and compliance staff monitor defendant compliance, assess treatment needs, and help direct them to social service resources. The Court leverages additional outside-agency resources with City funds to encourage defendants to successfully complete court orders. Work crew, community service, day reporting, and electronic home monitoring are used as alternatives to jail incarceration. The Court has achieved significant jail savings to the City since implementation of these programs.

The Mental Health Court, established in 1999, is nationally recognized for serving misdemeanor offenders who are chronically mentally ill or developmentally disabled. Intensive court supervision ensures accountability with court conditions and provides greater assurance of public safety. The Court expects defendants to maintain treatment compliance, contacts with social service providers and adherence with other conditions of release. This includes no contact orders with any victims or businesses impacted by the offender's actions. This is considered a model therapeutic court.

The Seattle Community Court, started as a pilot project in 2005, is a nationally recognized problem solving court. This innovative program enables people charged with non-violent misdemeanors to access social services while paying back the community with community service hours.

New in 2012 is the Seattle Veterans Treatment court. This is intended to meet the needs of returning service members from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, and other military personnel honorably discharged. The Court works closely with the King County Department of Community and Human Services, the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to access agency resources available to veterans in distress. Typically the veterans come before the court for substance abuse and serious mental health issues. Treatment incorporates core values of military life including integrity, initiative and accountability. This new calendar is expected to expand as the number of veterans increase along with the need to address adjustment difficulties in a supportive and encouraging environment.

One and a half judges are dedicated to the Domestic Violence Court where special emphasis is placed on accountability for offender actions. Our specialized probation unit refers noncompliance issues to two dedicated half day review and revocation calendars each week. Judges come to know defendants and can make informed judgments before making sentencing and probation review decisions holding defendants responsible for their actions. Victim safety is a primary concern in these cases.

The Court continues to lead judicial administrative reform and is actively leading a new Seattle Criminal Justice Council that is initiating coordination on technology projects that will affect all criminal justice partners.

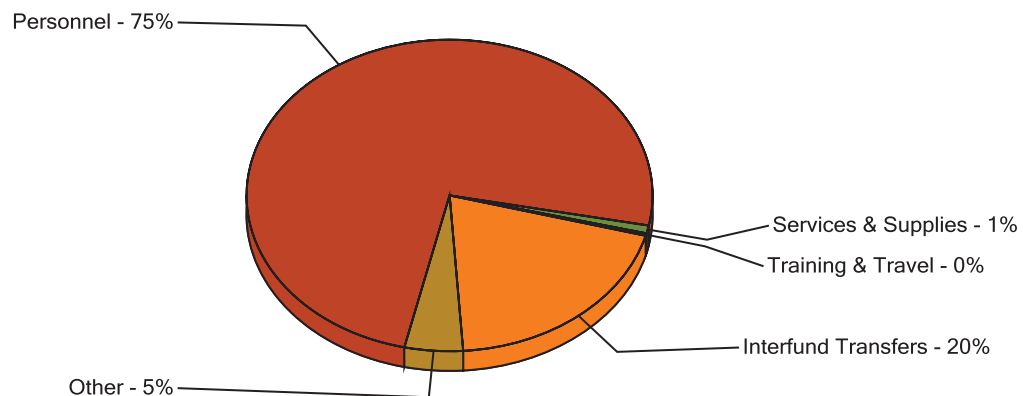
Budget Snapshot

Department Support	2011 Actual	2012 Adopted	2013 Proposed	2014 Proposed
General Fund Support	\$25,854,773	\$26,637,689	\$27,506,958	\$28,289,465
Total Operations	\$25,854,773	\$26,637,689	\$27,506,958	\$28,289,465
Total Appropriations	\$25,854,773	\$26,637,689	\$27,506,958	\$28,289,465
Full-time Equivalent Total*	214.10	214.10	212.60	212.60

* FTE totals are provided for information purposes only. Changes in FTEs resulting from City Council or Personnel Director actions outside of the budget process may not be detailed here.

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2013 Proposed Budget - Expenditure by Category



Budget Overview

The Seattle Municipal Court's priority is the adjudication of criminal trials. However, the Court carefully balances this with a focus on innovative problem solving programs. The specialty courts work with defendants on the underlying causes of criminal behavior. The goal is to avoid other criminal charges that would require a return to court.

The 2013-2014 Proposed Budget includes two reductions to the Court, generating a savings of nearly \$130,000. The first reduction consolidates magistrate hearings related to infractions from four Neighborhood Service Centers to the Justice Center downtown. Fewer residents are contesting their citations in person, preferring instead to take advantage of the Court's mail-in option. Also, in the future, residents will have the option to do this electronically. As such, the Court believes it can handle the caseload by only offering in-person services at the downtown Justice Center, generating \$75,000 in savings.

The second reduction finds savings by automating the call reminder program. In an effort to reduce the failure to appear rate of defendants, a phone call is made by administrative staff to remind defendants of their court dates. In 2012, the Court has identified funds to purchase software to automate this program. By 2013, staffing will be reduced resulting in a savings of almost \$56,000.

In addition, the Court implemented a debit/credit online payment fee increase starting in July of 2012. This will carry into 2013 and provide an annual increase to the General Fund of about \$200,000. The Court increased the fee from \$3.00 to \$4.00. The Seattle Municipal Code allows city agencies to apply a fee to these transactions to offset the cost of the transaction. There is no fee for debit/credit card payments made in person, pursuant to existing credit card company agreements.

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Incremental Budget Changes

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	2013		2014	
	Budget	FTE	Budget	FTE
Total 2012 Adopted Budget	\$ 26,637,689	214.10	\$ 26,637,689	214.10
Baseline Changes				
Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	\$ 1,197,027	0.00	\$ 2,094,959	0.00
Proposed Policy Changes				
Consolidate Neighborhood Magistrate Hearings	-\$ 73,568	-0.50	-\$ 74,306	-0.50
Automate Call Reminder Program	-\$ 54,726	-1.00	-\$ 56,367	-1.00
Transfer Staff Between Divisions	\$ 0	0.00	\$ 0	0.00
Proposed Technical Changes				
Final Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	-\$ 199,465	0.00	-\$ 312,510	0.00
Total Incremental Changes	\$ 869,268	-1.50	\$ 1,651,776	-1.50
2013 - 2014 Proposed Budget	\$ 27,506,958	212.60	\$ 28,289,465	212.60

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Description of Incremental Budget Changes

Baseline Changes

Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes - \$1,197,027

Citywide technical adjustments made in the "Baseline Phase" reflect changes due to inflation, central cost allocations, retirement, health care, workers' compensation, and employment costs. These adjustments reflect initial assumptions about these costs and inflators early in the budget process.

Proposed Policy Changes

Consolidate Neighborhood Magistrate Hearings - (\$73,568)/(.50) FTE

The Seattle Municipal Court allows residents to schedule mitigated and contested pre-hearings related to infractions at four Neighborhood Service Centers (NSC). Hearings are held one day each week in Lake City, Ballard, Southwest, and West Seattle. On the fifth day of each week, the magistrate works from the Justice Center downtown. However, the number of people who are seeking in-person mitigation and contested hearings is down as more residents take advantage of the Court's Adjudication by Mail (AdMail) program. As such, the Court plans to consolidate all of these cases at the downtown Justice Center, allowing the court to reduce administrative staffing costs. In addition to AdMail, the Court is moving towards electronic magistrate hearings which would give residents another access point beyond a trip downtown to the Justice Center.

Automate Call Reminder Program - (\$54,726)/(1.00) FTE

Over 10,000 calls are made each year to remind defendants of their court date. The call reminders, currently made by Court personnel, have helped to reduce defendants' failure to appear (FTA) rate. FTA's result in bench warrants, frequent bookings and additional jail costs. The FTA rate in 2011 was 25%. In 2013, the Court will utilize software to automate these calls, allowing the Court to eliminate an administrative position and save \$54,726. With this automation, the Court hopes to achieve comparable FTA rates to live person reminders and not more than 25%.

Transfer Staff Between Divisions

This change transfers the Court's Chief Clerk and a Research and Evaluation Assistant from Court Administration to Court Operations to better align the positions to their functional unit. This is a technical, budget neutral transaction.

Proposed Technical Changes

Final Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes - (\$199,465)

Citywide technical adjustments made in the "Proposed Phase" reflect changes due to inflation, central cost allocations, retirement, health care, workers' compensation, and unemployment costs. These adjustments typically reflect updates to preliminary cost assumptions established in the "Baseline Phase."

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Expenditure Overview

Appropriations	Summit Code	2011 Actual	2012 Adopted	2013 Proposed	2014 Proposed
Court Administration Budget Control Level	M3000	5,836,729	5,913,131	6,117,522	6,278,791
Court Compliance Budget Control Level	M4000	5,065,999	5,214,167	5,343,927	5,492,767
Court Operations Budget Control Level	M2000	14,952,045	15,510,391	16,045,509	16,517,907
Department Total		25,854,773	26,637,689	27,506,958	28,289,465
Department Full-time Equivalents Total*		214.10	214.10	212.60	212.60

* FTE totals are provided for information purposes only. Changes in FTEs resulting from City Council or Personnel Director actions outside of the budget process may not be detailed here.

Appropriations By Budget Control Level (BCL) and Program

Court Administration Budget Control Level

The purpose of the Court Administration Budget Control Level is to provide administrative controls, develop and provide strategic direction, and provide policy and program development.

Program Expenditures	2011 Actual	2012 Adopted	2013 Proposed	2014 Proposed
Court Administration	5,836,729	5,913,131	6,117,522	6,278,791
Total	5,836,729	5,913,131	6,117,522	6,278,791
Full-time Equivalents Total*	34.00	34.00	32.00	32.00

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Court Compliance Budget Control Level

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

Program Expenditures	2011 Actual	2012 Adopted	2013 Proposed	2014 Proposed
Court Compliance	5,065,999	5,214,167	5,343,927	5,492,767
Total	5,065,999	5,214,167	5,343,927	5,492,767
Full-time Equivalents Total*	41.85	41.85	41.85	41.85

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Court Operations Budget Control Level

The purpose of the Court Operations Budget Control Level is to hold hearings and address legal requirements for defendants and others who come before the Court. Some proceedings are held in formal courtrooms and others in magistrate offices, with the goal of providing timely resolution of alleged violations of City ordinances and misdemeanor crimes committed within the Seattle city limits.

Program Expenditures	2011 Actual	2012 Adopted	2013 Proposed	2014 Proposed
Court Operations	14,952,045	15,510,391	16,045,509	16,517,907
Total	14,952,045	15,510,391	16,045,509	16,517,907
Full-time Equivalents Total*	138.25	138.25	138.75	138.75

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