

The Municipal Court of Seattle

Report to the Community

2011



“Our mission is to provide fair, accessible, and timely resolution of alleged violations of the Seattle Municipal Code. We strive to respect the public, attorneys, and other criminal justice partners. The Seattle Municipal Court values and recognizes its employees and is a contributing partner working toward a safe and vital community.”

Judicial Officers 2011



Top row, left to right

Honorable Willie J. Gregory
Honorable Steve Rosen
Honorable Edward McKenna
Honorable Karen Donohue

Front row, left to right

Honorable Judith M. Hightower
Honorable Fred Bonner, Presiding
Honorable C. Kimi Kondo

The Seattle Municipal Court processes more cases than any other municipal court in the State of Washington with seven elected judges and 5.5 appointed magistrates. The 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.

Misdemeanors are crimes where the maximum sentence is 90 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine. Gross misdemeanors are such crimes that carry a maximum sentence of a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine. Infractions are acts which are prohibited by law but are not legally defined as a crime; Civil offenses are heard by the Court when the City of Seattle seeks enforcement of its fire code, housing, and City ordinance violations.

The majority of the judges' workload is dedicated to trials (both jury and non-jury), pre-trial hearings, arraignments, sentencing, and case reviews. Judicial officers are empowered by the laws of the State of Washington to perform marriage ceremonies.

Every other year, the judges select one judge to act as presiding judge for a two-year term. The presiding judge is responsible for administrative operations and judicial departments, including magistrate operations.

Magistrates



Top row, left to right

Magistrate Robert Chung
Magistrate Adam Eisenberg
Magistrate Francis Devilla
Magistrate Park Eng

Front row, left to right

Magistrate Lisa Leone
Magistrate Shirley Wilson

Magistrates are appointed by judges of the Court. The duties and responsibilities that may be assigned to magistrates include the adjudication of contested civil traffic infractions, parking infractions, and various ordinance violations, presiding over mitigation and contested settlement conferences, and such other duties as may be assigned by the presiding judge.

Magistrates are expected to perform their assigned duties and responsibilities in a timely and efficient manner, consistent with law, and with appropriate judicial demeanor and respect for the rights of court participants and court personnel.

Message from the Presiding Judge



Our mission is to provide fair, accessible, and timely resolution of alleged violations of the Seattle Municipal Code. We strive to respect the public, attorneys, other criminal justice partners. The Seattle Municipal Court values and recognizes its employees and is a contributing partner working toward a safe and vital community.

During 2011, over 13,000 criminal cases were filed, including 2,000 domestic violence cases and 1,500 DUI cases, along with 81 civil cases. Infraction charges filed included over 51,000 for traffic violations and 580,000 for parking and red light traffic camera violations.

We are proud to be able to serve defendants and the community with four specialty courts. Our Community Court was recently selected as one of three mentor court sites by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance. Seattle's Mental Health Court is a voluntary program for defendants who may have a mental illness or be developmentally disabled. Misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor cases involving domestic violence are heard in our Domestic Violence Court. New this year is our Veterans Treatment Court, which addresses the needs of veterans for treatment as a result of substance abuse and/or mental health disorders. In July, we began offering a theft awareness class for defendants who are charged with theft of merchandise in the amount of \$500 or less and who appear in Community Court. The class is eight hours and is designed to provide defendants an opportunity to learn about the impacts of theft on the broader community.

By working with community organizations, the Court has increased access for citizens and enhanced compliance with court-ordered conditions. The Court Compliance staff monitor defendant compliance, assess treatment needs and help direct defendants to resources to help them live successfully in the community. The Court continues to leverage additional outside agency resources with City funds to support defendants successfully completing court orders. Day Reporting, work crews, community service, and electronic home monitoring are used as alternatives to jail. I encourage you to find out more about what we do on our website at www.seattle.gov/courts.

In these difficult economic times, when courts are being asked to do more with less, it is important to remind the community about the importance of courts in the legal system. Courts provide justice and a forum for the resolution of all types of disputes. While we've had to make some hard choices in the types and level of services that may be impacted, we have remained committed to our mission. I would like to thank our employees for their continued support and dedication through these challenging economic times.

Welcome to Seattle Municipal Court!

Fred Bonner
Presiding Judge

Court Administrator Introduction



As a municipal court serving an urban community, we are committed to insuring that justice prevails in every case and that every citizen has the opportunity to “have their day in court.” Since our last report to the community, we have worked with our criminal justice partners to complete several initiatives that enhance and streamline services to the public.

One of the greatest challenges facing government in general, and the court in particular, has been the economic impacts facing the Puget Sound Region. Court funding comes from the City of Seattle’s General Fund and, faced with ongoing budget reductions, the Court has continually looked for ways to reduce our operational costs. During 2011, over 10,000 criminal cases were filed, 81 civil cases, 2,000 domestic violence cases, and 1,500 DUI cases. Infraction charges filed included over 51,000 for traffic violations, 534,000 for parking violations, and 46,000 for red light traffic camera violations. In 2011, the Court’s budget was reduced by approximately \$1.1 million or 4.2%. Despite this reduction in funds, we were able to maintain important services to defendants and the public, which you will read about in this report. The Court also evaluated fees imposed for providing services and, where appropriate, increased the costs for some services.

With the assistance of the Washington State Administrative Office of Courts, a Judicial Workload Study was completed to determine how many judicial resources are necessary to support the Court’s work. The Court will update this study in the future to insure that we, as a separate branch of City government, have the resources necessary to effectively process all cases filed with the Court. We continue to work closely with King County District and Superior Courts to organize common Court services.

Besides the personal stories and information on the accomplishments of our specialty Court programs, this report also contains information about Court filings and trends which could impact our operations. For example, providing interpreter services to individuals accused of crimes is necessary to insure access to justice and that defendants understand the charges and Court process. We work with the prosecutor and defense attorneys, social service agencies, and treatment providers to insure that interpreters on site are fully utilized.

On behalf of the more than 200 employees of the Court, I am proud of the achievements outlined in this report.

Yolande E. Williams

Interpreter Services

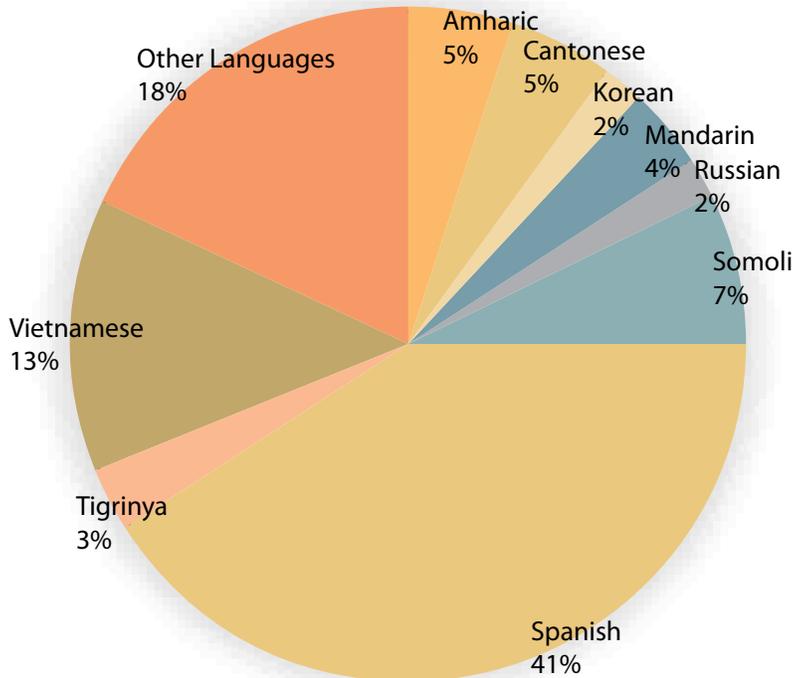
Seattle has increasingly become a multi-lingual city over the last three decades.

In 1980, the immigrant population made up 11 percent of Seattle’s total population. In 2000, it was 17%. Today, immigrants are 20% of Seattle’s population. Navigating the legal system can be challenging for those with limited English-proficiency skills.

The mission of the Court Interpreter Services is to provide high quality service to the Court, fulfilling the Court’s legal requirement to provide equal access to justice and due process. We provide interpreter services for courtroom and magistrate proceedings, attorney-client interviews, witness interviews, probation services, electronic home monitoring, revenue recovery, community services and other Court services. Interpreters facilitate communication with crime victims through the prosecutor’s office, including working with crime victims’ advocates.

While around 40% of our current caseload is in the Spanish language, requests in other languages are frequent as well, as shown in the chart below. In 2011, 2,100 defendants, witnesses, and victims utilized interpreter services. Over 6,500 hearings and interviews were conducted with the help of interpreters. Services are also provided to hearing impaired clients, including American Sign Language, relay, and tactile interpreting.

Most Frequently Used Languages in 2011



Seattle Community Court

The program has had many positive responses from defendants, such as, “Community Court opened my eyes to the destruction of property in the community. It gave me a sense of pride and accomplishment to do my part to help.”

The Seattle Community Court was established in March 2005, as a joint effort between the Seattle Municipal Court, the Seattle City Attorney’s Office and the Associated Counsel for the Accused, which is a public defense agency.

The program’s original goals were to hold defendants accountable to the community through community service assignments in the neighborhood where the crime occurred. Linkages to housing, chemical dependency treatment, mental health, educational and employment services were also goals, as well as reducing jail utilization and recidivism. During 2011, 2,800 hearings were scheduled, and defendants completed approximately 7,100 hours of community service.

Seattle Community Court has generated national recognition as one of a growing number of domestic and international Community Courts. The Court was one of three Community Court sites chosen as a “mentor site” by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, serving as a peer resource for other jurisdictions looking to improve their criminal justice system. Mentor court sites host visits and share best practices through training and conferences.



Community Court defendants at work

SMC Veterans Treatment Court

A pilot Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) was established in September 2011, and is a voluntary Court-monitored long-term therapeutic treatment program that addresses the mental health and/or substance abuse issues of the veteran defendant. SMC VTC is a collaboration between the Seattle Municipal Court, the Seattle City Attorney's Office, Associated Counsel for the Accused, the King County Department of Community and Human Services, the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Through the combination of structured support provided by the Court, health care and other social service resources provided by the Federal and State Departments of Veterans Affairs, the City expects to see a reduction in recidivism and an increase in veterans accessing needed services from the VA and community-based providers. Defendants participating in VTC will receive assistance with establishing VA benefits, which include mental health treatment, chemical dependency treatment, housing, and general health care treatment.

"The creation of Veterans Court is part of a larger national and state movement that addresses the needs of past and returning veterans," said Judge Fred Bonner. "We need to recognize the stress of their complex deployment, and design programs to help the veteran rather than lock him/her up. We owe them as much. The Court does not provide the veteran preferential treatment. The VTC diverts veterans to programs that can help them.

"I believe that it is our legal and moral duty to provide all of the help necessary to restore our veterans to the condition that they were in prior to their enlistment." —Judge Fred Bonner



Mental Health Court

Efforts of the Seattle Mental Health Court team members have saved thousands of jail days, and thousands of hospital bed days. Seventy percent of successful defendants who graduated in 2007 had no new criminal charges 18 months after completing the program.

The Seattle's Mental Health Court (MHC) began operations in March 1999, and was the first municipal mental health court in the country and the fourth mental health court overall. The program is voluntary, and referrals come from judges, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and jail staff. Defendants are evaluated to determine if mental illness is related to or a cause of their alleged criminal activity. If they choose this program, they will receive specialized services beginning as soon as their case is heard in court. If a defendant chooses not to participate, they may still be referred back at a later date. In 2011, over 5,000 hearings were scheduled in the MHC.

Seattle Mental Health Court Team

Back row l-r:

Joni Wilson, Rob Fors,
Torrance Green,
Russell Kurth,
Steve Connolly,
Kirsten Longaker,
Sheila Murray,
Shelly Brown,
Andrea Chin

Front row l-r:

Roopali Dhingra,
Judy Ashley,
Honorable Willie Gregory,
Sonya Oh,
Jennifer Grant,
Kelly Mason



Jury Duty

Let the judges answer to the question of law, and the jurors to the matter of fact. - Law Maxim

Juries are the keystone of our system of justice, and jurors, who take on one of a citizen's most demanding duties, should be treated with great respect. The United States Constitution and the Washington State Constitution guarantee all people the right to a trial by an impartial jury. Justice depends on citizens serving as jurors in our courts.

During 2010, approximately 3,000 jurors served in Seattle Municipal Court out of 15,000 citizens summoned. In 2011, 14,000 citizens were summoned and 3,100 served as jurors.

Eligibility

You cannot serve on a jury if you have been convicted of a felony and your civil rights have not been restored. If you are in doubt about your eligibility for jury service, you may call, email or write to the Jury Assembly Clerk.

Jury Assembly Clerk
Municipal Court of Seattle
Seattle Justice Center
600 Fifth Avenue
PO Box 34987
Seattle, WA 98124-4987
206.684.5688 | <http://www.seattle.gov/courts/jury/juryservice.htm>

How a Jury is Chosen

After you have reported for jury duty, you will be selected for a jury panel along with other jurors. The jury panel is sent to the courtroom which is trying a case. A jury of six people will be selected in the courtroom. The judge in the courtroom will explain the case and introduce the lawyers and other participants. As part of jury selection, the judge and the lawyers will then question the jury panel members to determine if anyone has knowledge of the case, a personal interest in it, or any feelings that might make it hard to be impartial. This process is called "voir dire", a phrase meaning "to speak the truth".

During the voir dire the lawyers may ask the judge to excuse a juror from sitting on the case. This is called "challenging a juror." There are two types of challenges: a challenge for cause means the lawyer has a specific legal reason to have a juror excused. Peremptory challenges do not require the lawyers to state any reason for excusing a juror and are intended to allow lawyers for both prosecution and defense to find jurors receptive to their arguments. For more information about reporting to jury service and the types of cases typically heard, go to <http://www.seattle.gov/courts/jury/juryservice.htm>

Employee Recognition

We value our employees and are committed to promoting programs to recognize Court staff for their service to the community and commitment to the Court's Mission. Our Recognition Program has two components:

Formal Recognition

An Annual Employee Recognition is held during the winter season to recognize employees who have reached service milestones with the City of Seattle and the Court. This celebration also includes a Formal Awards presentation to recognize employees who have demonstrated the Court values of quality justice and standards of excellence, while promoting an outstanding organizational culture. Nominees and recipients of the formal awards are nominated and selected by their peers. This event is coordinated by Human Resources and a planning committee comprised of Court employees.

Informal Recognition

The informal recognition programs are designed to provide employees opportunities to acknowledge contributions of individuals, teams, and work groups throughout the year. Employees can acknowledge the work of others through an on-line Kudos page. In addition, management staff provides individual recognition awards throughout the year. Three times each year, Court leadership honors all Court employees for their hard work and dedication by hosting a summer luncheon, fall awards ceremony, and an annual holiday breakfast.

l-r:
Sarah Girganoff,
Berlinda Womack,
Crystal Lampkin,
Nick Zajchowski,
Jan Esterly are
recognized for five
years of service



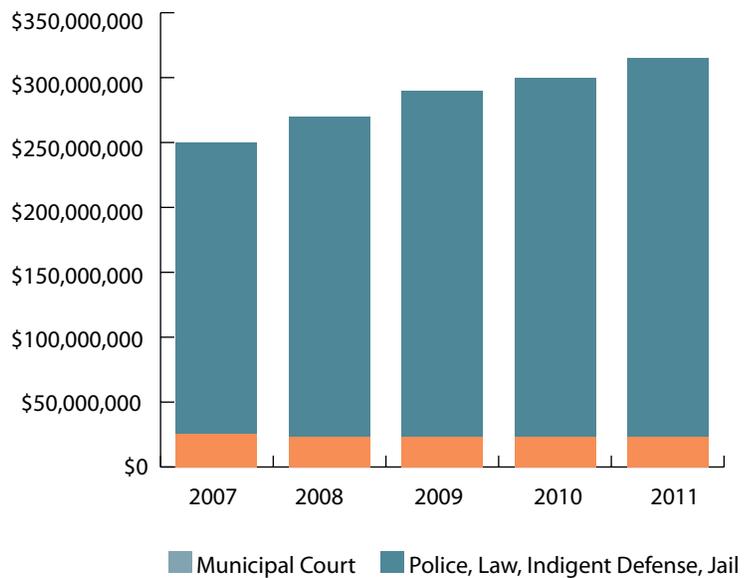
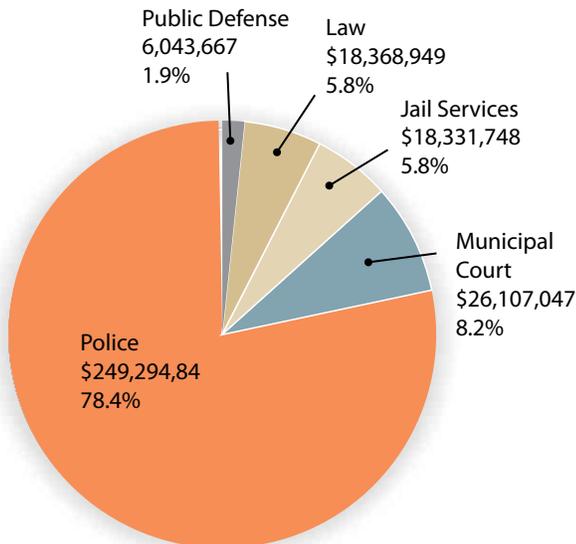
The Seattle Municipal Court Budget

A 5 Year Public Safety Budget Comparison

	2011		2010		2009		2008		2007	
Municipal Court	\$26,107,047	* 8.2%	\$26,735,554	* 8.6%	\$27,046,026	* 9.0%	\$25,832,552	9.1%*	\$25,056,108	9.2%*
Jail Services	\$18,331,746	5.8%	\$18,476,852	5.9%	\$17,522,952	5.8%	\$17,294,069	6.1%	\$16,099,682	5.9%
Law	\$18,368,949	5.8%	\$18,226,070	5.8%	\$18,227,051	6.1%	\$17,765,538	6.3%	\$16,887,539	6.2%
Public Defense	\$6,043,667	1.9%	\$5,425,163	1.7%	\$5,468,340	1.8%	\$5,085,509	1.8%	\$4,849,113	1.8%
Police	\$249,294,843	78.4%	\$242,813,874	77.9%	\$232,768,218	77.3%	\$216,681,234	76.7%	\$208,344,898	76.8%
Total:	\$318,146,252		\$311,677,513		\$301,032,587		\$282,658,902		\$271,237,340	

* Percent of Total Budget

2011 Public Safety Budget



How to Get to Seattle Municipal Court at the Seattle Justice Center



The Seattle Justice Center is located at:

**600 Fifth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104**

Telephone:

206.684.5600

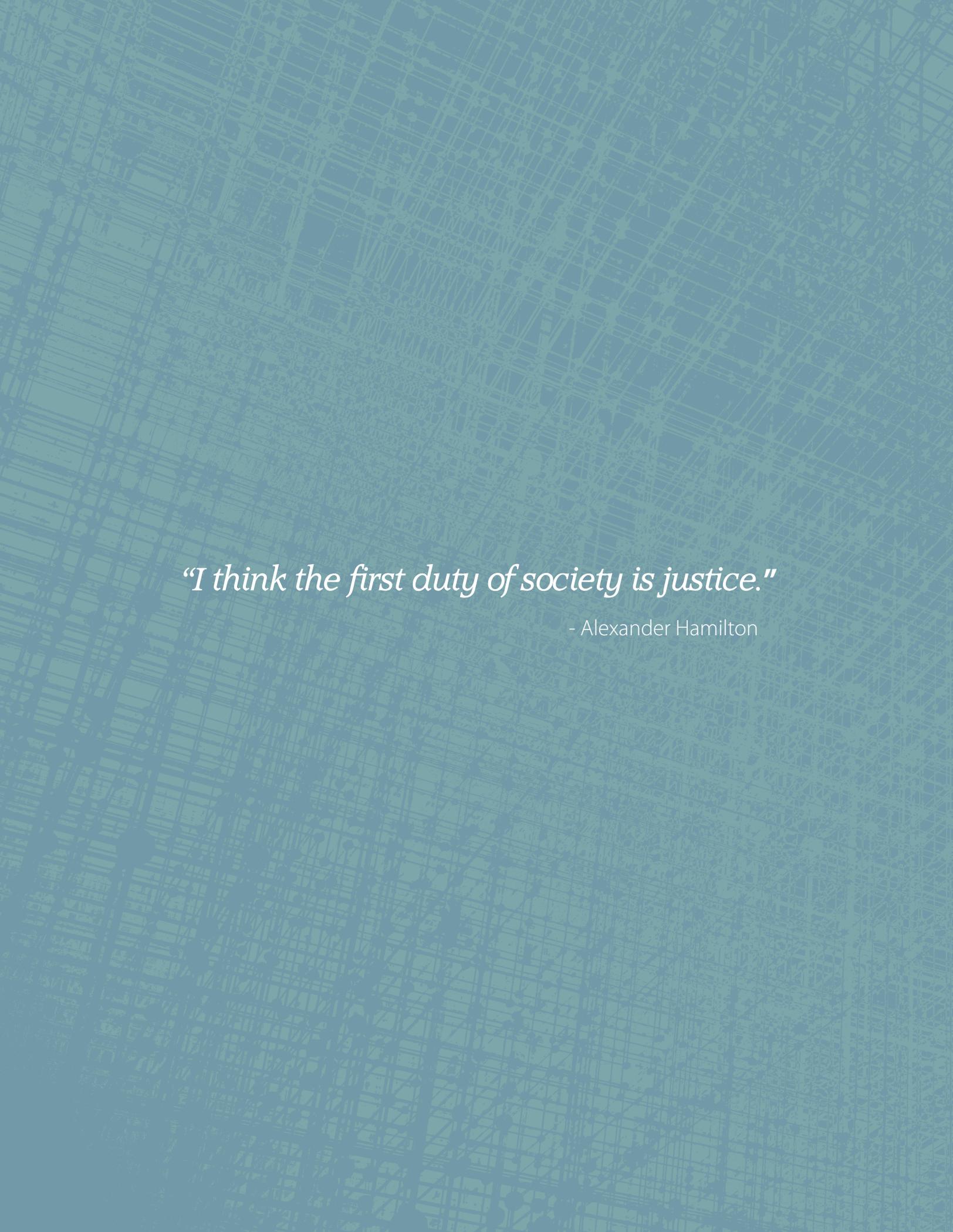
The entrance to the Court is on Fifth Avenue between James and Cherry Streets in downtown Seattle.

Traveling by Car

Take I-5 to the James Street exit to downtown Seattle (Exit 164A northbound/Exit 165A southbound). If traveling north, you will turn left onto James Street; if traveling south, you will turn right onto James Street.

Traveling by Bus

To find the best bus route using Metro's Trip Planner, go to <http://tripplanner.metrokc.gov> and enter "Fifth Avenue & Cherry Street" or "Fifth Avenue & James Street" as your destination point.



“I think the first duty of society is justice.”

- Alexander Hamilton