

Seattle Municipal Court

Fred Bonner, Presiding Judge

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Department Description

The Seattle Municipal Court processes more cases than any other municipal court in the State of Washington. Seattle Municipal Court has concurrent jurisdiction with King County District Court and 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 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 citizens and enhanced compliance with court-ordered conditions. The Court Compliance staff monitors defendant compliance, assesses the treatment needs of defendants, and helps direct defendants to resources that will help them live successfully in the community. The Court continues to leverage additional outside-agency resources with City funds to support defendants through successful completion of court orders. Work crews, community service, the Day Reporting program, and electronic home monitoring are used as alternatives to jail incarceration. 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.

The Court continues to lead judicial administrative reform, working closely with the King County District Court and Superior Court in organizing common court services. Additionally, the Court has expanded its community focus to include both a Community Court and Domestic Violence Court. These specialized courts provide dedicated judicial, staff, and social services support to defendants charged with criminal law violations.

Policy and Program Changes

In developing the 2011 Adopted Budget, the City of Seattle's General Fund was facing a \$67 million shortfall for 2011. The 2011 Adopted Budget includes reductions for all General Fund-dependent functions. Seattle Municipal Court's 2011 Adopted Budget includes both expenditure reductions and increased revenues in order to close the gap.

In order to achieve operational savings in 2010, the Court identified a number of reductions that were implemented mid-year. Several of these reductions are included in the 2011 Adopted and 2012 Endorsed Budget, including the reduction of an Administrative Specialist position which helps create case files at the beginning of a case. The Court is working to use technology to make this process less labor intensive by increasing electronic data sharing and retention. The Court is also eliminating an Accounting Technician position whose job duties will be redistributed to existing staff. Finally, the Court is reducing various operations and maintenance accounts by \$150,000.

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In 2010, the Seattle City Council passed legislation reducing the number of Municipal Court judges from eight to seven, effective January 1, 2011. The Adopted Budget reflects this change and includes the reduction of one Judge, one Courtroom Bailiff, and one Courtroom Clerk.

Maintaining direct services to the public is a high priority for the Court and the Mayor. The 2011 Adopted Budget reflects this priority by making reductions primarily in administrative support areas. These cuts include the reduction of an Administrative Specialist position in the Finance Division from full-time to part-time, the elimination of an Administrative Specialist position in Human Resources, and the reassignment of an Administrative Specialist position in Court Administration who will take on new duties to support the scofflaw program. Job duties affected by these position reductions will be redistributed to existing staff or eliminated.

The Court is also proposing to eliminate its Court Commissioner and replace it with an existing part-time Magistrate position that will then be increased to full time. This change will result in a net reduction of a part-time position. The Court primarily uses magistrate positions to handle infraction cases, but also uses them to handle criminal cases in courtrooms.

The Court is taking advantage of technology improvements to find efficiencies and, as a result, eliminate two Indigent Defense Screener positions. Using existing funding and staff, the Court has developed a public defense information system, which was implemented in 2010. With this new system, the Court will be able to use the same staff which interview defendants to assess their eligibility for release from jail to also assess whether they are eligible for a public defender and, if so, to assign them to defense attorneys.

One reduction in direct services is included in the Adopted Budget. The Court runs a day-reporting program that is an alternative to jail for pre-trial defendants who have a history of failing to appear for court but do not represent a public safety threat. In 2008, the Court expanded this program and added a Probation Counselor to supervise sentenced offenders who are not likely to succeed under traditional probation supervision (e.g. are homeless and have a history of failing to comply), and are in violation of the terms of their sentence (e.g. failing to go to treatment or appear for probation hearings). The 2011 Adopted Budget eliminates funding, but not the position authority, for the Probation Counselor, as it was an expansion to the program's original purpose which was keeping pre-trial defendants out of jail. Unless the Court is able to identify savings elsewhere in its budget to fund this position, the Court will no longer have the option of sending sentenced offenders who are violating the terms of their sentence conditions to Day Reporting.

The 2011 Adopted Budget includes some new funding and also redirects existing resources in support of the scofflaw program. Under this program, people with four or more unpaid parking tickets will be identified as "scofflaws" and may be subject to having a boot placed on their car. The Court is reassigning a Strategic Advisor position to serve as the Program Coordinator for the scofflaw program and that position will be backfilled with two part-time positions from the Research, Policy, and Evaluation Group. The Court will also reassign an Administrative Specialist position to provide support to this program. This position will research cases when people dispute their scofflaw status and prepare cases that end up going before the magistrates. New funding is included for a mailing to notify people that they are on the scofflaw list and may be subject to having their cars booted. The Program Coordinator and the Administrative Specialist costs, in addition to other expenditures in the Seattle Police Department, are more than offset by the \$1.9 million in additional 2011 revenues to the City as a result of this program. Finally, a new half-time magistrate position is being added to the Court in anticipation of the increased workload that will be generated by adding new parking enforcement officers in the Seattle Police Department.

The 2011 Adopted Budget includes a number of technical changes, including the transfer of some Community Court functions from the Law Department. The Court will take over responsibility for managing the AmeriCorps Volunteers that work with Community Court and the Court's community service program.

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Finally, the Court is also proposing some revenue increases. The Court implemented three of these revenue increases in mid-2010: a fee increase from \$1 to \$3 to handle credit card payments made via the internet (there is no charge for payments sent in by U.S. mail or made in-person); an increase from \$100 to \$122 in the administrative fee for deferred findings; and a \$10 fee to set up time-payment plans. In 2011, the Court is proposing to increase revenue collections by working with its collection agency, Alliance One, to process a larger volume of garnishments for people who owe the Court past due fines. The Court is also proposing to increase the monthly probation fee from \$20 to \$25. Lastly, the Court will increase revenue collections related to red light camera violations.

City Council Provisos

There are no Council provisos.

Municipal Court

	Summit	2009	2010	2011	2012
Appropriations	Code	Actual	Adopted	Adopted	Endorsed
Court Administration Budget Control Level	M3000	5,939,182	6,036,129	5,861,767	5,941,429
Court Compliance Budget Control Level	M4000	6,196,465	5,991,535	5,025,119	5,118,156
Court Operations Budget Control Level	M2000	14,676,797	14,707,890	15,220,160	15,525,110
Department Total		26,812,444	26,735,554	26,107,047	26,584,695
Department Full-time Equivalents Total*		222.10	222.10	214.10	214.10
<i>* FTE totals are provided for informational purposes only. Changes in FTEs resulting from City Council or Personnel Director actions outside of the budget process may not be detailed here.</i>					
Resources		2009	2010	2011	2012
General Subfund		26,812,444	26,735,554	26,107,047	26,584,695
Department Total		26,812,444	26,735,554	26,107,047	26,584,695

Court Administration Budget Control Level

Purpose Statement

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.

Summary

Reduce budget by \$37,000 and reduce 1.0 FTE Administrative Specialist I to 0.5 FTE to assist in balancing the overall General Fund budget. This position provides support in the Court's Mailroom. The position's duties will be redistributed to other staff.

Reduce budget by \$67,000 and abrogate 1.0 FTE Administrative Specialist II to assist in balancing the overall General Fund budget. This position provides support in the Court's Human Resources unit. The position's duties will be redistributed to other staff.

Reduce budget by \$67,000 and abrogate 1.0 FTE Accounting Technician II to assist in balancing the overall General Fund budget. This position provides support in the Court's Finance unit. The position's duties will be redistributed to other staff.

Reduce funding by \$96,000 in various operations and maintenance accounts.

The Mayor and the Council worked with the Coalition of City Labor Unions to identify mechanisms for reducing labor costs in the face of the City's strained financial situation. As a result of ratified agreements with represented employees and commensurate savings for non-represented positions in 'step-in-grade' classifications, this program will achieve \$35,000 in savings in the Court Compliance Budget Control Level (BCL).

Increase funding by \$64,000 and increase a Management Systems Analyst II from 0.5 FTE to 1.0 FTE to accommodate a transfer of a body of work from the City Attorney's Office to the Court. The Court will take over responsibility for managing the AmeriCorps Volunteers that work with Community Court as well overseeing the community service aspect of the Court.

Increase funding by \$5,000 for the transfer of the lease for a copier that is located at the Court and is dedicated for use by public defense agencies. In 2010, this copier lease was budgeted in the Criminal Justice Contracted Services Department.

Citywide adjustments to labor and other operating costs increase the budget by \$59,000 for a net decrease of \$174,000 from the 2010 Adopted Budget to the 2011 Adopted Budget.

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Expenditures/FTE	Actual	Adopted	Adopted	Endorsed
Court Administration	5,939,182	6,036,129	5,861,767	5,941,429
Full-time Equivalents Total*	36.00	36.00	34.00	34.00

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

Court Compliance Budget Control Level

Purpose Statement

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.

Summary

Reduce budget by \$89,000 for a Probation Counselor II to assist in balancing the overall General Fund budget. This position supervises sentenced offenders who are ordered to the Day Reporting Program. Although funding was eliminated, the Court retained the position authority for this position.

Reduce budget by \$160,000 and abrogate 2.0 FTE Public Defense Screeners to assist in balancing the overall General Fund budget. The Court has developed a new public defense information system that will allow the same staff that interview defendants to assess their eligibility for release from jail to also assess whether they are eligible for a public defender and, if so, to assign them to defense attorneys.

Reduce funding by \$22,000 as a result of a new agreement with the State Department of Corrections which has agreed to accept up to 10 work crew participants daily at no charge from Seattle Municipal Court in return for the City's continued agreement to fund a work crew that provides service in Southeast Seattle. Previously, the Department of Corrections charged the Court approximately \$22,000 annually. Funding for the Southeast Seattle work crew is included in the Criminal Justice Contracted Services budget.

Reduce funding by \$16,000 in various operations and maintenance accounts.

The Mayor and the Council worked with the Coalition of City Labor Unions to identify mechanisms for reducing labor costs in the face of the City's strained financial situation. As a result of ratified agreements with represented employees and commensurate savings for non-represented positions in 'step-in-grade' classifications, this program will achieve \$36,000 in savings in the Court Compliance Budget Control Level (BCL).

Transfer \$807,000 and 11 FTE from the Court Compliance BCL to the Court Operations BCL. In 2010, the Court realigned operations as a result of the span of control review and management and supervisor reductions. The Court transferred the Revenue Recovery and Time Payment units from Court Compliance to the Court Payment Division to support an organizational structure with a reduced number of managers. This technical adjustment aligns the budget with the Court's organizational structure.

Citywide adjustments to labor and other operating costs increase the budget by \$164,000 for a net decrease of \$966,000 from the 2010 Adopted Budget to the 2011 Adopted Budget.

Expenditures/FTE	2009	2010	2011	2012
	Actual	Adopted	Adopted	Endorsed
Court Compliance	6,196,465	5,991,535	5,025,119	5,118,156
Full-time Equivalents Total*	54.85	54.85	41.85	41.85

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Court Operations Budget Control Level

Purpose Statement

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.

Summary

Reduce budget by \$306,000 and abrogate 1.0 FTE Judge, 1.0 FTE Bailiff, and 1.0 FTE Court Clerk. This change reflects Council action in 2010 which reduced the number of Municipal Court judges from eight to seven.

Reduce budget by \$58,000 and abrogate 1.0 FTE Administrative Specialist I to assist in balancing the overall General Fund budget. The position's duties will be redistributed to other staff.

Reduce budget by \$152,000 and abrogate 1.0 FTE Court Commissioner to assist in balancing the overall General Fund budget. This reduction will be partially offset by increasing a half-time Magistrate to full-time and an increased budget of \$57,000.

Increase funding by \$56,000 and 0.5 FTE to add a half-time magistrate position. This position is being added in anticipation of increased workload due to the addition of new parking enforcement officers in the Seattle Police Department.

Reduce funding by \$38,000 in various operations and maintenance accounts.

The Mayor and the Council worked with the Coalition of City Labor Unions to identify mechanisms for reducing labor costs in the face of the City's strained financial situation. As a result of ratified agreements with represented employees and commensurate savings for non-represented positions in 'step-in-grade' classifications, this program will achieve \$103,000 in savings in the Court Compliance Budget Control Level (BCL).

Transfer \$807,000 and 11 FTE from the Court Compliance BCL to the Court Operations BCL. In 2010, the Court realigned operations as a result of the span of control review and management and supervisor reductions. The Court transferred the Revenue Recovery and Time Payment units from Court Compliance to the Court Payment Division to support an organizational structure with a reduced number of managers. This technical adjustment aligns the budget with the Court's organizational structure.

Increase budget by \$17,000 to pay for a mailing to notify people that they are on the scofflaw list and may be subject to having their cars booted.

Citywide adjustments to labor and other operating costs increase the budget by \$232,000 for a net increase of \$512,000 from the 2010 Adopted Budget to the 2011 Adopted Budget.

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Expenditures/FTE	Actual	Adopted	Adopted	Endorsed
Court Operations	14,676,797	14,707,890	15,220,160	15,525,110
Full-time Equivalents Total*	131.25	131.25	138.25	138.25

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