



# 2025 Annual Report

SEATTLE CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
ANN DAVISON



December 2025

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## Letter from City Attorney Ann Davison

This report marks my fourth annual analysis of our work in the Seattle City Attorney's Office. I'm proud of all we have accomplished, not just this year, but throughout my term. Serving as your City Attorney has been one of the privileges of my life.

When I was elected, I vowed to make the actions of this Office transparent to the public. For too long, crime had been rising in Seattle without answers from our public safety leaders. We learned that thousands of crimes—from property crimes to assault—were going unprosecuted.

As I took office in 2022, 76% of the public thought the city was on the wrong track, according to a recent poll\*. The public said enough was enough. Our laws mattered and it was time they were enforced fairly.

Over the past four years, we've created a significant change in our public safety systems. The King County Jail agreed to start booking misdemeanor offenders again. I cleared a backlog of almost 5,000 cases that had accumulated. We expedited filing decisions on new cases in order to not leave victims waiting indefinitely for justice. And the City Attorney's Office once again became a trusted partner of the Seattle Police Department in our joint effort to improve public safety.

We created new laws to reclaim for the public areas of our city that had been ceded to criminal activity like drug markets and prostitution. Our after-hours legislation addressed problematic late-night venues repeatedly tied to homicides and violence, resulting in a significant drop in crime in and around these venues. I introduced, and Council passed this year, an ordinance that allowed me to pursue civil penalties against prolific graffiti taggers.

I also fought for the values of Seattle through numerous civil actions. I won the largest settlement by a city from the chemical company Monsanto for its contamination of the Lower Duwamish River with PCBs. By suing automakers Kia and Hyundai, I held corporate actors accountable for their role in our car theft crisis. I directed civil action against Glock, Inc. for its manufacturing practices that allow easy conversion to automatic weapons. I sued the Trump Administration for unlawfully withholding funds from the City of Seattle.

After all of our work, this fall that same poll showed that, for the first time in the past five years, a majority of residents believed Seattle was heading in the right direction. I believe that change was meaningfully connected to what we've accomplished here at CAO.

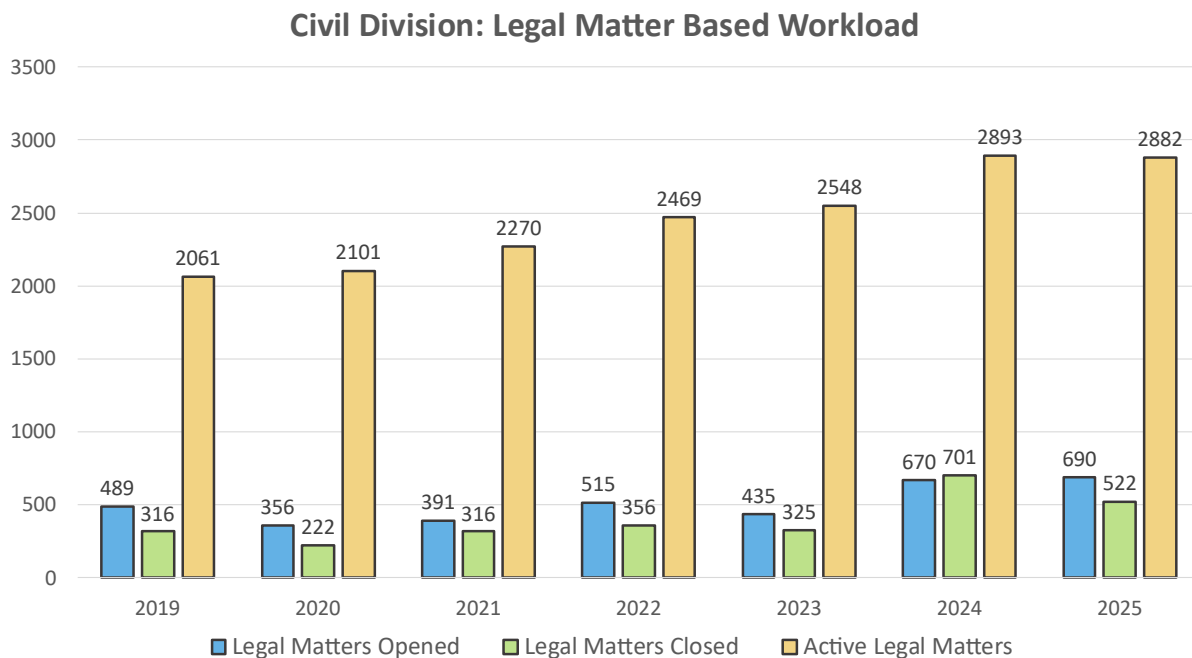
It is with gratitude that I leave you with this annual report, detailing the work we've accomplished this past year.

City Attorney Ann Davison



## Civil Division Overview

The Civil Division provides comprehensive legal services to the City of Seattle government, including executive, judicial, and legislative branch officials, department heads, managers and staff, and City boards and commissions. In its role as an in-house law firm for the City, the Civil Division performs transactional and advising work for its clients, works closely with them to solve legal issues, and represents the City in litigation and administrative proceedings in local, regional, state, and federal venues. The Civil Division consists of about 35 professional staff and 75 Assistant City Attorneys and comprises eight sections specializing in different areas of law: Civil Enforcement; Constitutional and Complex Litigation; Contracts and Utilities; Employment; Environmental Protection; Government Affairs; Land Use; and Torts. Data in this report is through the middle of December.

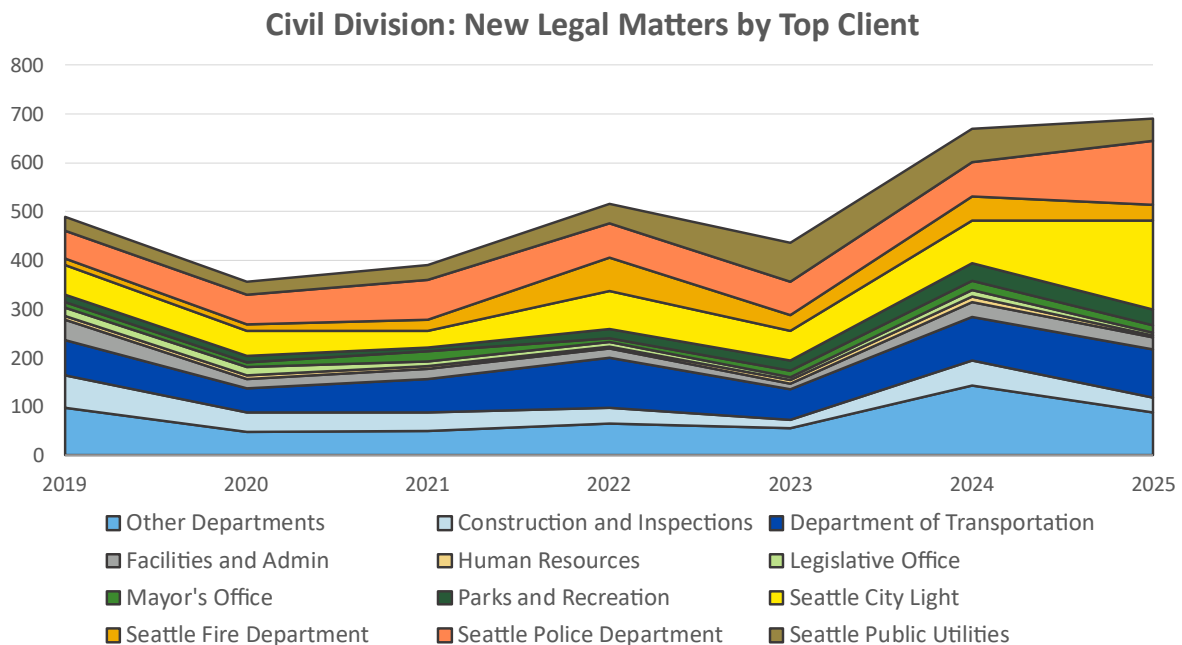


Civil Division attorneys track most of their legal work in “legal matters.” This chart shows the new legal matters created each year, the matters that have closed, and the matters still active at some point in the year. Many cases, especially those with a high level of complexity, can remain active for many years and some forms of advice can be ongoing for an extensive period of time. *Some matters were added by bifurcation so they don’t show up as being opened that year.*

## Civil Division Clients

The Civil Division served the following City of Seattle departments in 2024.

- **Mayor's Office (MO)** on direction and control of all City offices and departments, unless the Charter provides otherwise.
- **Legislative Department (LEG)** on Council and related legislative services.
- **City Light (SCL)** on electrical utility functions.
- **Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI)** on permitting services, code compliance, design review, emergency management, land use, trade licensing, and other services.
- **Finance and Administrative Services (FAS)** on purchasing and contracting, Animal Shelter, real estate services, capital development, facilities operations, and other public facing and internal service divisions.
- **Human Resources (SDHR)** on programs and services related to the City's work force.
- **Parks and Recreation (SPR)** on all parks systems and programming.
- **Public Utilities (SPU)** on water, sewer, drainage, waste collection services, and gas.
- **Department of Transportation (SDOT)** on streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, public spaces, and other transportation system functions.



# Civil Division Sections

## Civil Enforcement Section

The Civil Enforcement Section enforces City regulations and collections for all City departments. Section attorneys also advise and litigate cases on behalf of their clients, including the Department of Construction and Inspections, the Office of Labor Standards, the Office for Civil Rights, the Fire Department, and the Department of Transportation. In 2025, Section attorneys helped resolve non-compliance issues; educated owners and employers about compliance with City regulations; and recovered on behalf of injured parties. Below are examples of work performed by the Section.

### ***Civil Forfeitures***

State law allows for the seizure and forfeiture of property by law enforcement under certain circumstances, such as when a vehicle is used to facilitate the sale or delivery of drugs, or when property is acquired with proceeds from a crime. Section attorneys represent the Seattle Police Department (SPD) in forfeiture actions when an individual contests the department's seizure of their personal property. In 2025, Section attorneys handled over 20 civil forfeiture cases often corresponding with criminal cases involving weapons and drugs.

### ***Seattle Animal Shelter Actions***

The director of the Seattle Animal Shelter may declare an animal dangerous. The Civil Enforcement Section advises the Shelter, and handles appeals and settlements of those declarations. In 2025, Section attorneys assisted with reviewing over 20 Preliminary Determinations of Dangerous Animal. Most cases resolved in settlement agreements that imposed conditions on the owners and their dog(s) to keep the public safe. Some cases went on to an appeal hearing before the Seattle Hearing Examiner. Section attorneys also appear for the Shelter in animal forfeiture cases where animals are removed from the owner due to abuse or neglect.

### ***Graffiti Enforcement***

A new ordinance adding a civil enforcement tool against prolific graffiti taggers became law in August 2025. The stated purpose of these civil actions is to discourage future illegal graffiti and renumerate the City for the substantial costs of abatement. The new ordinance subjects a graffiti tagger to a civil penalty of up to \$1,500 per illegal graffiti violation within three years of the filing date. The tagger is also liable for restitution of costs incurred by the City, or a private property owner, including but not limited to all labor and materials costs of removing

the illegal graffiti. The Court may convert the civil penalties to community service and order the defendant to perform graffiti abatement. The Civil Enforcement Section worked with SPD to file the first cases in September 2025.

### ***After-Hours Nightlife Lounges***

A new ordinance adding enforcement of after-hours nightlife lounges became law in May of 2025. The Ordinance was passed to address public safety concerns, including shootings and violence, between the hours of 2 and 6 a.m. The Ordinance governs businesses, nonprofits, and clubs open between those hours and whose purpose in those hours include socializing and either smoking or dancing. The Ordinance does not cover certain businesses, including restaurants, all-age dance clubs, or adult entertainment venues. The law requires after-hours nightlife lounges to employ at least two security personnel, operate video surveillance, prevent weapons from entering premises, create a written safety plan, allow entry by all City peace officers during operating hours, and obtain and comply with all required state and city permits and licenses. The Ordinance is enforced by the Consumer Protection Division (CPD) of the City Department of Finance and Administrative Services. The penalty for the first violation of the Ordinance is \$1,000; the penalty for subsequent violations within a five year period is \$5,000. Following an educational outreach campaign in May, CPD began late-night inspections. Civil Enforcement attorneys have advised on implementing the ordinance. CPD has issued 21 citations with most of those going to repeat offenders.

### ***Real Property Code Enforcement***

The Section enforces more than a dozen different codes administered by the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI). These cases include tree protection violations, unpermitted construction, unpermitted modifications to property, land use code violations, and unauthorized junk storage. One enforcement case involved a new three story, five-bedroom, three-bathroom house on a subdivided lot. The side sewer serving multiple properties was almost a hundred years old. The new large house would add significant flow, or output, to the old sewer line. Seattle's Side Sewer Ordinance requires that when a property owner builds a structure that will be serviced by an older sewer line, there are steps required to make sure the line can handle the total flow. Property owners must either rehabilitate the sewer line (e.g., by lining it with epoxy) or test it thoroughly to make sure it can safely handle the resulting flow from added fixtures. Unfortunately, the new house was completed without the required inspections or rehabilitation to the side sewer line. SDCI informed the owner that the older sewer needed to be fixed or tested to make sure it would not fail. When the owner did not cooperate, Section attorneys filed suit and successfully obtained a judgment against the owner.

### ***Vacant and Derelict Building Enforcement***

In 2025, Section attorneys worked with the Seattle Fire Department, SDCI, and SPD to bring more than a dozen public nuisance actions to address many problematic properties and to encourage demolition, repair, or development. One case involved a two-story home along Aurora Ave just south of the Aurora Bridge. The owner failed to keep the property secure and free of entry by unauthorized individuals. Neighbors complained about break-ins and City inspectors found the interior of the structure contaminated with biohazardous waste and trash. Section attorneys brought a nuisance action which persuaded the owner to sell the property to a buyer with plans to develop the site and to recover civil penalties for Fire Code violations. Another problem property was a former bank building in the University District. Starting in 2020, it became a public nuisance with trespassers occupying the first floor and basement. SDCI and SFD inspectors commented that the building had deteriorated to the point of being a “drive-thru illicit drug store” with drug deals and sales happening often in the parking lot. After filing suit, Section attorneys persuaded the out-of-state owner to hire contractors to demolish the structure and settle the civil penalties for the Fire Code violations.

### ***Labor Standards Enforcement***

Attorneys advise the Office of Labor Standards (OLS) and help the department with enforcement of many worker-protection ordinances, including Wage Theft, Minimum Wage, Paid Sick and Safe Time, and Secure Scheduling. During 2025, attorneys advised on various OLS enforcement matters and represented OLS before the Hearing Examiner when the Director’s Final Order was appealed. One matter handled this year involved a local coffee shop that did not pay a worker for time worked. OLS initiated an investigation, and the owner admitted the violation. OLS issued the Findings of Fact, Determination and Final Order finding the business and the owner violated SMC 14.20 (Wage Theft) and ordered recovery of the unpaid wages, interest, and liquidated damages for the worker. The CAO obtained a judgment enforcing the Director’s Order in Seattle Municipal Court.

### ***Civil Rights Enforcement***

Seattle Office for Civil Rights (SOCR) investigates claims of discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, and contracting in the City. Section attorneys advise SOCR and represent the department before the Seattle Hearing Examiner. This year, the attorneys worked with SOCR to resolve cases involving housing discrimination and unfair housing practices to recover for injured parties.



## Constitutional and Complex Litigation Section

Constitutional and Complex Litigation (CCL) attorneys represent the City in litigation arising out of police action, legislation, or executive action. CCL also represents the City in public records litigation, inquests, and affirmative litigation.

### ***Consent Decree***

In 2012, a federal court entered a Consent Decree between the City and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) which mandated that SPD make extensive policy, training, and operational changes to its policing practices. The Consent Decree addressed DOJ allegations that SPD had a pattern or practice of using unconstitutional, excessive force.

In fall 2023, the federal court overseeing the Decree terminated most of its core requirements upon determining that the City sustained compliance with them. The Court recognized how far SPD had come since 2012 and established the remaining requirements the City must meet.

Throughout 2024 and the first half of this year, the City worked hard to meet these outstanding requirements.

- The Court-appointed monitor determined that the City's independent policy accountability system is "quite effective" and "positioned to provide sustainable oversight in the future";
- The Office of Inspector General for Public Safety evaluated SPD's response to people in crisis, and confirmed that officers demonstrated respect for subjects' dignity and used decision-making to de-escalate situations;
- SPD demonstrated exceedingly low levels of force at crowd events between 2021-2025;
- In consultation with City Council, Office of Inspector General for Public Safety, Office of Police Accountability, and Community Police Commission, SPD developed an improved, revised Crowd Management policy—the Court found this policy to be "the best current effort" nationwide;
- Based on these achievements, the City moved for the Court to end the consent decree regarding SPD, which the Court did on September 3, 2025, concluding thirteen years of federal oversight.

### ***Federal Response***

Last year, CCL attorneys and other CAO staff collaborated to form a team focused on increased workload brought about by federal executive orders and other directives from the Trump Administration. In 2025, while continuing to advise clients about how to protect the

City's interests in the face of rapidly changing federal policy, the team won a succession of legal victories—both with Seattle as lead plaintiff and in coalition with other local governments. These court orders protect the City's congressionally appropriated grant funds from being withdrawn unlawfully based on the Trump Administration's anti-immigrant, anti-DEI, and gender-reactionary policies.

- (Oct. 31, 2025) the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington granted Seattle's motion for a preliminary injunction against the Trump Administration's Executive Orders that unlawfully tie federal grant funds to the Administration's policy preferences on diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), and gender ideology.
- (June 16, 2025) Seattle joined with four other cities in a lawsuit challenging the Department of Homeland Security's withholding of counter-terrorism funds appropriated by Congress through the Securing the Cities program. Without the funds, Seattle could lose critical resources for safety planning, precautions, and equipment ahead of major events like the 2026 FIFA World Cup, for which Seattle is a host city. After the lawsuit was filed, DHS released some funds to Seattle, but the lawsuit continues as to other parts of the funding freeze.
- (Apr. 24, 2025) Seattle joined with a coalition of local governments in securing an order enjoining the Trump Administration's directives to withhold all federal funds from local governments that do not help with federal immigration enforcement. The order, issued by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, stops the federal government from unilaterally cutting funds for services that provide support for survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence; investigations of child sexual assault; and salaries for police officers and fire fighters.

Because of this work, Seattle continues to receive its congressionally appropriated funds. The grant funds are critical to supporting public services in Seattle, including law enforcement, housing, transportation, and disaster prevention.

### ***Initiative 2066***

The City joined King County and environmental groups in a lawsuit challenging the pro-natural-gas initiative, with CCL attorneys providing representation. I-2066, if implemented, could have undermined Seattle's Green New Deal, Energy Codes, clean energy regulations and programs. The King County Superior Court enjoined the law as unconstitutional, declaring it violated the Washington constitution's single-subject requirement, the subject-and-title requirement, and prohibition against amending existing laws without identifying them.

### ***eDiscovery***

The eDiscovery team continues to support the CAO and the City overall on all matters of eDiscovery, document and data retention, and complex document review. This past year, Microsoft launched a new interface for Purview eDiscovery, which allows users to search across the M365 platform for responding to discovery and public records requests. The eDiscovery team partnered closely with Microsoft to identify and launch tool enhancements to align with industry-standard eDiscovery practices. The global improvements made to date allow the City to conduct searches more thoroughly and efficiently, benefitting all public and private entities using Microsoft Purview eDiscovery.

### ***Kia/Hyundai***

The City was the first of many jurisdictions nationally to sue car manufacturers Kia and Hyundai for their failure to install industry theft-prevention standard safety interlock devices into lower model vehicles of certain years. This made the models more susceptible to theft and became the subject of TikTok “Kia Boyz” “how-to-steal” challenges that led to a significant national increase in the theft of Kias and Hyundais. These stolen vehicles are often used for other crimes, causing a significant need for police resources. Seattle filed a nuisance action against the companies. Many other jurisdictions joined. The case is pending in federal district court in California.

### ***Opioid Litigation***

CCL continues to monitor the City’s multi-year litigation efforts against opioid manufacturers and distributors for their harmful actions leading to the ongoing opioid epidemic. Throughout the last several years, the City has received funds through multiple settlements with companies. The opioid litigation is winding down, but the City will continue to receive disbursements from various settlements for years to come.

### ***Uber Technologies et al. v. City.***

In December 2024, Uber and Instacart sued in federal court challenging the City’s App-Based Worker Deactivation Rights Ordinance. Though passed in August 2023, the Ordinance had an effective date of January 1, 2025. It requires Uber and other like businesses to treat app-based workers fairly by requiring the companies to have a written policy explaining the conditions under which a worker may be removed from its platform, provide reasons when worker is deactivated, and create an internal appeal process. The Plaintiffs claim the Ordinance violates their First Amendment and Due Process rights. The City prevailed in the district court. The case is pending in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

### ***Police Action Matters***

CCL continues to represent the City's interests in Police Action litigation. This past year, CCL attorneys have had several successful outcomes early in litigation and at the summary judgment stage.

### **Contracts and Utilities Section**

The Contracts and Utilities Section provides legal services to every City department on a wide scope of City services and activities. Clients and projects include the City's municipal utilities; its bond financing; its Equitable Development Initiative; Waterfront Park construction, operations, and development; millions of dollars in low-income housing grants; the City's contracts with the King County Regional Homelessness Authority; human services contracts; childcare and education funding agreements; telecommunications issues, goods and services purchasing; public works contracting and claims; Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) and Seattle Center property issues and concessions; and a variety of leases, easements, real property acquisitions, and transfers.

### ***Memorial Stadium***

In 2025, the City Council approved execution of an interlocal agreement and a development agreement for Memorial Stadium, negotiated by Section attorneys, which allowed a summer 2025 groundbreaking. The old stadium was demolished, and the new stadium will transform Seattle Center sight lines, create new open space, and provide a much-needed modern stadium for Seattle Public Schools events, educational opportunities, and sporting events.

### ***FIFA World Cup 2026™***

In June 2022, Seattle was named one of sixteen North American host cities for FIFA World Cup 2026™. Section attorneys assisted in negotiating and finalizing a Mutual Support and Collaboration Agreement (Agreement) with the Seattle International Soccer Hosting Local Organizing Committee (LOC), and a Letter of Intent and Term Sheet with the LOC to host a Fan Celebration on the Seattle Center Campus during the World Cup Competition. In 2025, Section attorneys assisted the Mayor's Office with finalizing an Insurance Addendum to the Agreement; negotiating a Contribution Agreement defining the amount of funds to be contributed to the City by the LOC; and understanding the process for securing federal funding for safety and security at the World Cup in Seattle.

### ***Federal Grant Issues***

In 2025, the new federal administration made drastic changes to federal grant terms, potentially affecting significant funds used for City transportation projects, human services, and public safety programs. Section attorneys worked with City departments and the CAO litigation team to position the City to contest unlawful grant conditions while protecting the City's federal funding.

### ***Affordable Housing and Homeownership***

Section attorneys support the Office of Housing (OH) with OH funding awards. They advise on structuring, documenting, and closing rental housing loans and refinancings worth hundreds of millions of dollars, which will help residents facing housing insecurity for decades to come and help to shore-up aging affordable housing buildings throughout the City. On the homeownership front, Section attorneys closed loans for the development of permanently affordable housing in partnership with local nonprofit developers, including loans for projects on surplus land along MLK Boulevard and loans for 60 homes to prevent displacement in South Park, representing a more than \$13 million investment in permanently affordable homes.

### ***Debt Financing***

Section attorneys provided in-house legal support to the City's debt team in the Office of City Finance for annual bond issuances and other debt financing projects. In 2025, this financing was critical for the support of significant civic projects, including upgrades to the City's electric vehicle fleet infrastructure, Fire Station 31, Seattle Municipal Tower, City IT infrastructure, Waterfront development, and utility capital improvements for Seattle City Light (SCL) and Seattle Public Utilities (SPU). Section attorneys also worked with the City's debt team to refund Build America Bonds (BABs) issued by SCL and SPU, reducing uncertainty around federal policymaking as interest subsidy payments from the federal government can vary. Throughout the year, Section attorneys also worked with internal clients to maintain compliance with existing debt financing agreements, such as the EPA loan funding in part for the SPU's Ship Canal Water Quality Project. Section attorneys also supported ongoing City collaboration with civic institutions using private or public debt financing, including the Seattle Aquarium Society and the Museum Development Authority (which oversees the Seattle Art Museum).

### ***Wholesale Water Contract Amendments***

Through its SPU Water Division, Seattle serves 16 cities and water utility districts under long term full and partial requirements contracts for water supply. These contracts have periodic reopeners to amend parts of the contracts, with the most recent reopener ending in 2025. Section attorneys assisted SPU with negotiating the reopener of the contracts over the last several years. These negotiations were completed in 2025, with Seattle and each of the 16 cities and water utility districts agreeing to the same contract amendments. These amendments provide certainty for Seattle and its full and partial requirements customers by having automatic extensions of the contract term every ten years, expansion of stranded costs provisions, and flexibility and modernization through updates to many contract provisions. The First Restated and Amended Contract between the City and its full and partial requirements customers was approved by City Council on September 23, 2025, and will be executed by all parties before the end of the calendar year.

### ***Talaris Site Acquisition***

Section attorneys assisted SPU in negotiating the purchase, under the threat of condemnation, of a large parcel at 4000 NE 41st Street as part of SPU's regulatory responsibilities to fish-bearing creeks. Under part of this 17.77-acre parcel there is a 72-inch, publicly owned and maintained stormwater pipe that conveys Yesler Creek but is a barrier for fish passage. In 2023, SPU learned that it could no longer obtain state permits to maintain or extend the life of this 70-year-old pipe without removing fish barriers. The creek will require an approximate 100' wide channel and floodplain and will also create an environmentally critical area next to the channel. The entire property is landmarked as a historic site and was nearing development on a residential and commercial project that would have created 48 single family homes. SPU and the property owner prepared their own appraisals and negotiated a purchase price to reflect the site's fair market value. SPU has a purchase and sale agreement, which requires approval by the City Council before the property can close. On December 16, Council passed an ordinance approving the transaction.

### ***FERC Relicensing of Hydroelectric Projects***

SCL owns and operates hydroelectric projects that generate public power for its residential and commercial customers both within and outside the City. These locations require federal licenses issued by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). Section attorneys are helping SCL in multi-year relicensing processes to acquire new FERC licenses for both the Skagit Hydroelectric Project in Skagit and Whatcom Counties and for the South Fork Tolt Hydroelectric Project in east King County. These efforts involve complex settlement

negotiations with federal and state resource agencies and Indian Tribes to protect and enhance fish and wildlife species and habitat, improve flood risk management, and guarantee reliable, low-cost, and clean non-carbon producing hydropower in a changing climate. The result will be new long-term (40 or 50 year) FERC operating licenses for both projects that will continue to provide renewable electricity to Seattle area homes and businesses.

### ***Renewable Power Purchase Agreements***

Section attorneys supported SCL's efforts to enter into power purchase agreements (PPAs) for the purchase of renewable energy. Work included negotiating new PPAs with renewable energy Sellers, negotiating amendments to PPAs and advising SCL on contract administration issues to facilitate delivery of the contracted-for renewable energy to SCL. This work is continuing, and the upcoming months will likely see the execution and implementation of more PPAs for renewable energy.

### ***Comcast Cable Franchise Amendment***

Section attorneys and Seattle Information Technology Department (ITD) negotiated an amendment to the City's cable franchise with Comcast. The amendment will extend the current 10-year franchise, executed in January 2016, an additional seven years, through January 20, 2033. The proposed amendment retains many benefits to the City and its residents, including continued cable TV discounts to subscribers who qualify for the City's Utility Discount program; continued complimentary cable TV service to City buildings and schools; an increase in the support fee for Public, Educational and Government (PEG) channel purposes; and guaranteed PEG channel capacity for existing PEG channels broadcasting on the cable system. The City will also increase the franchise fee paid by cable operators from 4.4% of gross cable revenues to 5% of gross cable revenues. Both the amendment and the increase in franchise fee require the approval by City Council, which ITD will seek to obtain by Ordinance, likely in early 2026.

## Employment Section

The Employment Section provides legal services to every City department, addressing all matters arising out of the work environment of City employees. Employment attorneys represent the City in litigation involving discrimination, ADA accommodations, leaves of absence, employee relations, investigations, human resources programs and services, benefits, workers' compensation, and labor relations. The Section also advises City policy makers, elected officials, departmental leadership, human resources professionals, and labor negotiators on labor and employment matters.

### ***Litigation Involving Seattle Police Officers***

In partnership with outside counsel, Section attorneys continued to defend multiple lawsuits with plaintiffs alleging discrimination arising from their employment at SPD. Four of these lawsuits were resolved, and more matters will continue to be litigated in 2026. Section attorneys also advised the newly appointed police chief regarding department-wide reorganization and senior-level personnel changes.

### ***COVID and the Workplace***

Employment Section attorneys continued to collectively advise on all parts regarding COVID-19 and the workplace, including the lifting of the City's COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate, Alternative Work Arrangement policies and guidelines, and Return to Office policies and procedures. The pandemic continued to bring new and unprecedented challenges to City policymakers, and Section attorneys continued to navigate a shifting legal landscape in federal, state, and local laws. Section attorneys also continued to defend a variety of litigated matters involving former City employees separated from employment due to the COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate. One lawsuit was dismissed in 2024, and a decision is pending from the plaintiff's appeal to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Another lawsuit, involving 45 plaintiffs spanning five City departments, was dismissed. More lawsuits related to the City's vaccine mandate will be litigated throughout 2026.

### ***Collective Bargaining/Labor Relations***

Employment Section attorneys continued to work with the City's Labor Relations group to have effective relationships with the City's labor partners, as well as to foster collaboration between Labor Relations and all City departments. This included providing legal advice as to the implementation and outcomes of proposed bargaining strategy, as well as defending City departments and Labor Relations in arbitrations resulting from grievances, contract interpretation issues, and appeals of disciplinary decisions. These efforts supported the



finalization of new contracts with the Seattle Police Officers Guild and the Seattle Police Management Association.

### ***Race and Social Justice Initiative***

The Section continues to provide legal advice and support to City departments regarding the implementation of the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative. This includes supporting City departments in upholding the values and intent of the Initiative, while also aligning implementation with updated EEOC Guidelines and new federal case law. In partnership with outside counsel, Section attorneys continued to defend a lawsuit brought by a City employee alleging harassment and constructive discharge arising from his required participation in training to support diversity and equity principles. These efforts led to a dismissal under a Motion for Summary Judgment. The plaintiff appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and briefs were submitted. This matter will be argued in 2026.

### ***Workers' Compensation Litigation and Investigations***

The Employment Section has a small practice team of attorneys and staff dedicated to providing legal advice and defending litigation involving the City's administration of workers' compensation benefits. The team also investigates allegations of willful misrepresentation by employees receiving benefits. In 2025, the team continued to pursue recovery of wage-replacement benefits paid to workers who did not report continued employment or where evidence revealed the workers were exceeding physical restrictions reported to their medical providers.

### ***Human Resources and Workforce Management***

Section attorneys continue to advise City departments regarding the management of their employees, including but not limited to workplace policies and procedures, performance management, discipline, ADA accommodations, leave and benefit administration, and investigations. One investigation involving a large workgroup for SCL concluded after two years, resulting in increased workplace training and related discipline for violations of workplace conduct. Employment Section attorneys also provide legal advice and defend litigation arising out of the City's Civil Service infrastructure. This work includes not only appearing before the City's two Civil Service Commissions to defend appeals but also work toward fostering collaboration between the Commissions and the City departments that employ workers with civil service status. Section attorneys also advised on the replacement and implementation of a new Citywide payroll and human resources delivery system, and related litigation involving wage calculations.

## Environmental Protection Section

The Environmental Protection Section provides legal services to all City departments regarding the full range of environmental legal issues. Much of this work is advising City staff how to follow state and federal environmental laws and permits. When the City is a potentially liable party under state or federal law for a contaminated site, the Section represents the City in negotiations with regulators, in settlements with other liable parties, and in litigation. Section attorneys also draft and review contract provisions regarding environmental issues, assisting SPU in enforcing and revising the City's Stormwater Code.

Examples of work of the Environmental Protection Section:

### ***Proactive Litigation***

Section attorneys handle proactive litigation against polluters. For example, Section attorneys litigated a case against The Boeing Company that resulted in Boeing agreeing to pay two-thirds of the costs to clean up a slip in the Lower Duwamish Waterway and associated upland areas.

### ***Contaminated Sites Under EPA or Ecology Orders***

The City participates in the investigation and remediation of various contaminated sites subject to orders by EPA or the Washington Department of Ecology. Examples are former City landfills, Gasworks Park, and the East Waterway next to Harbor Island. Section attorneys advise City staff how to follow the orders and applicable regulations and help with negotiating with the regulatory agencies and with other parties. In 2024, Section attorneys negotiated a complex agreement to manage settlement funds from 40 parties regarding the Lower Duwamish Waterway. They also negotiated an agreement with other parties to share the costs of work to design the remedy for the East Waterway.

### ***Contaminated Property and Rights of Way***

The City often encounters contamination in property the City owns or plans to acquire. Section attorneys advise staff in SPR, Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), SPU, and other departments regarding the applicable regulations, helping them identify options such as performing a voluntary cleanup or negotiating terms with another party. Contamination also can be found in City rights-of-way, often by parties performing a cleanup on adjacent property. Section attorneys help SDOT determine how to handle such situations.

### ***Stormwater Notices-of-Violation***

Section attorneys continued to advise SPU inspectors call on violations of the City's Stormwater Code. The attorneys review draft Notices-of-Violation and help inspectors determine the best course of action. Section attorneys also advise City staff when the City itself is found to have violated stormwater regulations, providing representation for the City in any related procedures or hearings.

### ***Drainage and Wastewater Issues***

Section attorneys continued to advise SPU regarding the City's drainage and wastewater system, including advising on issues including changes to the City's National Pollution Discharge Elimination ("NPDES") permits, amendments to the City's Stormwater Code, and implementation of a 2013 Consent Decree.

### ***Emerging Contaminants***

As federal and state regulatory agencies issue new regulations about newly identified contaminants, Section attorneys advise the departments how to comply and what liability they may incur. In 2025, this included consideration of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), a group of chemicals used in many products, including fire-fighting foam, non-stick cookware, and outdoor rain gear.

## Government Affairs Section

The Government Affairs Section (GA) advises on a variety of state and local government laws and topics, such as municipal finance and budgeting, initiatives and charter issues, the Washington State Open Public Meetings Act, Washington State Public Records Act, legislation drafting conventions, and inter/intra-governmental relations. Section attorneys also litigate and advise on tax issues. Below are examples of significant work by the GA Section.

### ***Seattle Shield Initiative***

On November 4, 2025, Seattle voters approved the Seattle Shield Initiative, a comprehensive overhaul of the City's business license tax (commonly called the B&O tax). GA attorneys worked with the MO and City Council to cut B&O taxes on small-and-medium size businesses, by increasing the B&O tax threshold from \$100,000 to \$2M in gross income, while increasing the share of B&O taxes paid by the largest businesses by increasing B&O tax rates. Section attorneys also helped craft a novel standard B&O tax deduction, exempting the first \$2M in a business's gross income from B&O taxation, and create new B&O tax credits for pediatric hospitals and comprehensive cancer centers.

### ***Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise Levy Renewal***

On November 4, 2025, Seattle voters approved the six-year, \$1.3 billion Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise Levy that will fund childcare and preschool, K-12 academic, physical and mental health supports, and student access to two-year degrees and trade programs. GA attorneys worked with the Department of Education and Early Learning and City Council to develop the legislation, including fulfilling the City Attorney's legal obligation to draft the ballot title and explanatory statement language presented to voters.

### ***Democracy Voucher Levy Renewal***

On August 5, 2025, Seattle voters approved the 10 year \$45 million Democracy Voucher Levy designed to enhance campaign financing accessibility by allowing residents to support candidates for City office with public funds. GA attorneys worked with the City Budget Office and City Council to develop the legislation, including fulfilling the City Attorney's legal obligation to draft the ballot title and explanatory statement language presented to voters.

### ***Federal Immigration Enforcement Matters***

Section attorneys helped the City's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs ("OIRA") on training OIRA conducted regarding the Mayoral Directive on federal immigration

enforcement and related matters. GA attorneys also assisted multiple City departments on immigration enforcement matters more broadly that arose in 2025.

### ***Government Affairs and the Legislative Process***

The CAO plays a central role in preparing all legislation sent to the City Council for consideration. Besides legal review of specific subjects by the proper attorneys, technical review of every ordinance and resolution is carried out by section editors, including the Code Reviser. In this role, the editors ensure proposed legislation meets City drafting standards and is generally accurate and accessible to the public. In 2025, the GA legislation editors partnered with the Office of the City Clerk to train attendees on how to use the Seattle Municipal Code and the differences in types of laws. The legislation editors also helped coordinate efforts among several departments to make legislation templates comply with upcoming federal standards on document accessibility, making sure each element can be read properly by screen reading technology.

### ***I-137 and the Social Housing Developer***

Seattle voters approved I-137 at a special election in February of 2025. The measure implements a new Payroll Expense Tax of 5% based on individual employee compensation exceeding \$1 million per year for businesses in the City. All proceeds of the tax, less administrative costs, are devoted to the Social Housing Developer (SHD), a public development authority created by I-135. In 2025, Section attorneys developed an interlocal agreement between the City and the SHD that will govern the process for the tax to be collected and distributed to the SHD.

### ***Public Records Act, Data Governance, and Records Retention Advice/Training***

The Washington State Public Records Act (PRA) and Records Retention Act (RRA) include important requirements for the production and preservation of City records. Section attorneys provide regular PRA trainings to City elected officials, City departments, City boards and commissions, cross departmental work groups such as City departmental public disclosure officers and the Citywide Public Records Act Program (CPRA). Some examples of GA's work in this area during the last year include participation in a MO led initiative to resolve long standing PRA compliance issues, addressing novel questions related to records related to work of the Community Assisted Response and Engagement department (CARE), and other departments in possession of sensitive health information, and developing advice as to the effect of amendments to RCW 49.12.240 and RCW 49.12.250 which require employers to provide employees with their personnel files upon request. This work was in

addition to the day-to-day support of PRA compliance in connection with the approximately 25,000 public disclosure requests the City received in 2025.

Section attorneys also regularly advise City departments regarding data management and responses to potential data security incidents involving City records. This includes advice and assistance to client departments on data sharing agreements and practices supporting the City's data initiatives and ongoing operations. This year, the Section's work in this area included advice related to a significant security data breach involving the Seattle Public Library. Section attorneys also provided significant support for the City's Affordable Seattle Data Sharing Agreement, participating in work supporting the City's Information Governance Board, and providing overall support for the City's efforts toward adopting Artificial Intelligence/Generative Artificial Intelligence tools and policies.

### ***Tax Litigation***

GA attorneys represented the City in tax appeals before the Hearing Examiner and King County Superior Court, winning favorable decisions on penalties, apportionment, and the taxation of investment income. The City prevailed in all tax litigation matters.

### ***Business Investment Areas***

The Section worked with Treasury to address ratepayer delinquencies in Business Improvement Areas (BIAs). These support efforts by the 11 BIAs in the City to promote business, tourism, and revitalization in their commercial districts.

### ***Open Public Meetings Act Trainings***

The Washington State Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) - RCW Chapter 42.30 - requires that all meetings of the City Council and certain City boards and commissions are open to the public. Section attorneys provide regular trainings and advice on the OPMA's requirements to members of the City Council and to members of City boards and commissions subject to the OPMA.

### ***Open Public Meetings Act Legal Monitor***

City Council Rules require that an attorney from the CAO, or outside counsel if appropriate, shall be present during all executive sessions as "legal monitor" to advise councilmembers on compliance with the OPMA. A GA attorney performed this role for each City Council executive session in 2025.

## Land Use Section

The Land Use Section provides legal counsel and defends City legislation and administrative decisions on zoning, planning, land use permitting, the State Environmental Policy Act, preservation of historic properties, street uses, and landlord-tenant regulations. Below are examples of work by the Land Use Section in 2025.

### ***Major Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulations Update***

2025 concluded with the City Council considering legislation to undertake a major update of the Comprehensive Plan and the first of two bills to amend development regulations to implement the amended Plan's vision. Required by the state Growth Management Act, the Plan is a roadmap to shape the City's growth in a way consistent with the state's mandate to accommodate increasing levels of residential density. Section attorneys worked closely with City officials and staff, including through over 100 Council-proposed amendments to the initial bill, to chart a course that advances their priorities within the bounds of the law. This also involved defending the environmental review for the Plan before the City Hearing Examiner and in court. (*Friends of Ravenna-Cowen v. City of Seattle* and *Godfrey v. City of Seattle*)

### ***Burke Gilman Trail "Missing Link"***

The regional Burke Gilman Trail has one "missing link": a stretch north of the Ship Canal in Ballard. A group opposed to the City's plan for completing the link challenged the environmental review for a redesign of the plan. The Shoreline Hearings Board sided with the group. Section attorneys appealed that ruling to the Washington State Court of Appeals, which has yet to issue a ruling. (*Ballard Coalition v. City of Seattle*)

### ***Sound Transit West Seattle-to-Ballard Expansion***

Sound Transit plans to expand its light rail system to connect West Seattle to Ballard. Section attorneys worked with City officials and staff to craft amendments to City development regulations—from critical areas to trees to design requirements—to accommodate this unique project.

### ***Tenant Protections***

The City Council enacted several measures aimed at enhancing protections for tenants. The owner of an apartment building sued the City, claiming six of those laws affect a cumulative, uncompensated taking of its property under the Washington Constitution. Section attorneys secured a dismissal of the case in King County Superior Court and are now defending that ruling in the Washington State Court of Appeals. (*GRE Downtowner LLC v. City of Seattle*)

### ***Tree Protections***

The City Council enacted a major update to the City's tree regulations, including provisions used by other Washington cities. A property rights group sued one city, arguing that such regulations amount to an unconstitutional taking of property without compensation. Recognizing the implications for the City's regulations, Section attorneys co-authored a "friend of the court" brief on behalf of the Washington State Association of Municipal Attorneys urging the Washington State Court of Appeals to reject the challenge. (*Rimmer v. City of Edmonds*)

### ***Low-Income Affordable Housing***

The Mandatory Housing Affordability program (MHA) is a pillar of the City's effort to address the lack of housing available to lower-income residents. MHA strikes a balance: developers who want to take advantage of expanded development capacity in some areas must rent some of the new units to low-income households at prices they can afford, or pay a fee that supports the City's efforts to build affordable low-income housing. Represented by a libertarian organization, a property owner sued the City, claiming MHA unconstitutionally takes their property. This year, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with Section attorneys that a federal trial judge correctly dismissed the case. The same organization filed a new suit against the City in the same trial court attacking the same law on the same grounds, but with a different set of plaintiffs. Section attorneys got the trial court to put that new case on hold pending the outcome of the appeal in the first case. (*Adams v. City of Seattle* and *Teshome v. City of Seattle*)

## **Torts Section**

The Torts Section litigates City personal injury and property damage cases, which range from relatively minor matters to multimillion-dollar lawsuits. The Section also regularly advises the City on a variety of risks. Below are examples of work by the Torts Section.

### ***Denny Blaine Park for All v. City***

The City is defending against claims there are nuisances at Denny Blaine Park related to historic nude beach use. The plaintiffs seek to eliminate all nude use of the Park, including by the LGBTQIA+ community.



### ***Johnson v. City***

The City is defending against claims that the towers at Gas Works Park amount to a public nuisance.

### ***Affirmative Litigation***

The City, assisted by outside counsel Keller Rohrback, sued Glock and local gun dealers regarding machine gun conversion devices. The City seeks damages and injunctive relief.

### ***Automobile Accident Litigation/Road Design Litigation***

The Torts section defends the City and City employees in automobile accident cases and cases alleging negligent road design. The section resolved multiple such cases in 2025. This category of cases includes car-pedestrian and car-bicycle accidents.

### ***Claims by City Employees***

Police and firefighters sometimes bring claims against the City, alleging that they should recover damages – in addition to worker’s compensation benefits - for City negligence. This year, this category includes a class of SPD employees alleging that they were exposed to harmful levels of exhaust while at work.

### ***Police Response Cases***

The Torts section defends the City in cases alleging that SPD negligently responded to 911 calls. In 2025, these matters included allegations that the City was responsible for failing to prevent suicides in some cases.

### ***Tender of City Defense***

The Torts section regularly makes claims for indemnity and as an additional insured on behalf of the City. Matters where the City as indemnified and/or an additional insured settled for over \$10 million in 2025.

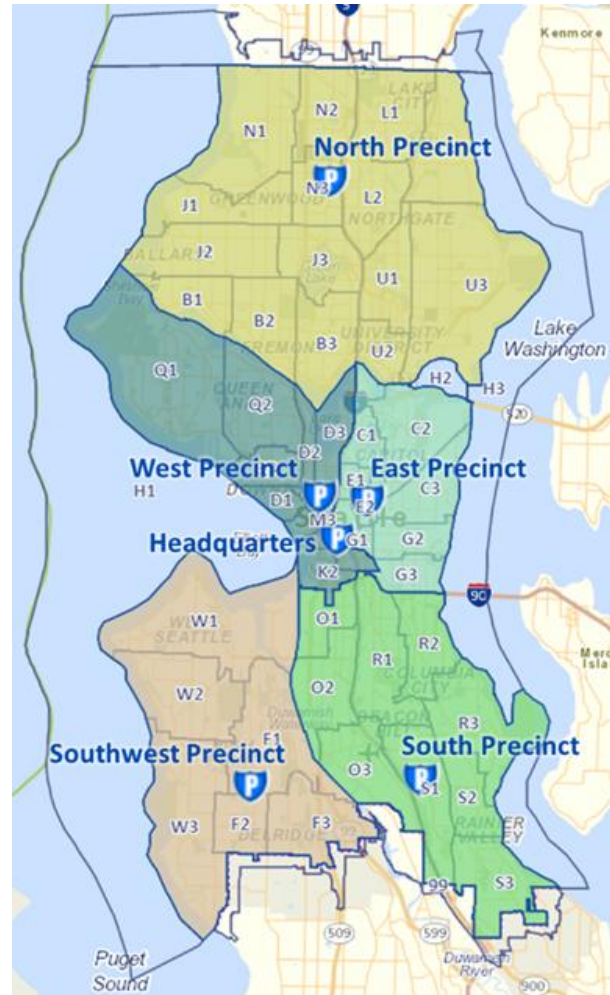
## Public Safety Liaisons

The Public Safety Liaison Program (formerly called Precinct Liaison Program) is a long term, proactive partnership of the Seattle City Attorney's Office, law enforcement, public and private organizations, and the community. The focus is on solving chronic neighborhood problems, improving public safety, and enhancing quality of life.

There are five police precincts which mirror the precinct boundaries established for City Council representation. Each precinct has an assigned attorney who works out of the precinct closely with Command Staff and Patrol.

The program is designed with specific goals in mind:

- reduce crime and enhance the quality of life in Seattle neighborhoods;
- develop a more efficient and effective response to public safety problems;
- improve communication among residents, prosecutors, police, and other City departments involved in problem-solving efforts.



The Public Safety Liaisons achieve these goals by:

- providing real-time proactive legal advice for officers in each precinct;
- working closely with other City agencies to address neighborhood problems before they become criminal problems;
- litigating appropriate code and criminal violations resulting from these efforts;
- facilitating community and intergovernmental communication and cooperation.

Below are some examples of the collaborative work done by the Public Safety Liaisons in 2025:

### ***Vacant Buildings***

The liaisons oversee the Vacant Buildings Operational Workgroup (OWG) that tracks the most high-profile vacant buildings in the City that represent significant health and public safety problems for multiple agencies, including Seattle Fire Department, Seattle Police Department, and Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection. These buildings often create safety issues for surrounding neighborhoods, including fire hazards and increased criminal activity. The liaisons have been responsible for maintaining the list of buildings, running monthly meetings, and coordinating agency efforts on specific buildings when necessary. The group started with a list of approximately 30 buildings, which has grown to a current list of 59 buildings. To date, 31 of those 59 buildings have been either demolished or rehabilitated, which has significantly alleviated the public safety issues associated with these buildings.

### ***Seattle Fire Department Partnership***

The liaisons serve as a liaison to the Seattle Fire Department by providing quarterly updates to SFD on assaults and threatening behavior as reported by firefighters and other personnel. They also track data related to obstructing cases where individuals have obstructed a firefighter in the course of official duties. As needed, they also provide advice and guidance on public safety issues as it relates to SFD, and help coordinate witness contact and testimony for cases with the CAO Criminal Division.

### ***Seattle Police Department Trainings and Advice Work***

The liaisons are instrumental in the continued training of SPD officers. In addition to various roll call trainings at their respective precincts on topics such as search and seizure, criminal procedure issues, and testimony preparation, the liaisons also work in a more formal capacity with SPD's training Unit.

The liaisons provided training to all SPD sergeants on search and seizure law, as part of the Sergeant Sustainment School. The liaisons also instructed on best practices for report writing, and on best practices for domestic violence crimes, on a quarterly basis as part of SPD's Field Training Officer School.

Additionally, the liaisons are constantly available to provide real-time legal advice to SPD personnel dealing with issues in the field. Liaisons have navigated issues on search warrants, arrest procedures, Miranda warnings, and various other questions. The ability for officers to receive real-time answers in challenging scenarios helps officers correctly perform their duties, ensuring the criminal case is not compromised and that officers are acting lawfully.

### ***Training for Parks Department and Parks Safety Issues***

The liaisons also serve as liaison to the Seattle park rangers. They provide guidance related to park ranger enforcement authority, as well as conduct regular trainings for park ranger personnel. Most commonly, they provide guidance and training on Parks Trespass Warnings and Exclusions. Liaisons have provided enforcement authority advice, guidance, and training to other services contracted with Parks, such as the Emergency Services Unit (ESU).

Many City parks experienced an uptick in criminal activity like gun violence and late-night parties. These issues generated complaints across the City, and the liaisons were an instrumental part of the larger citywide group dedicated to this issue. The liaisons worked closely with the Parks Department, Mayor's Office and SPD to create strategies at specific parks with the goal of decreasing violence. The liaisons also provided training to the various departments and advice on implementation.

### ***Graffiti Projects – Criminal and Civil***

The liaisons have been working on a graffiti task force that consists of the CAO, the Mayor's Office, the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and SPD. The task force began this work at the investigation stage, which included identifying prolific taggers, applying for search warrants, and tracking down potential graffiti sites to contact taggers while actively engaging in property destruction. The task force was able to work up 35 felony cases on 16 prolific taggers, all of which were sent to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office for felony charges. A liaison was then cross-deputized as a prosecutor for KCPAO to handle all aspects of negotiation on these graffiti matters, and ensure these individuals are pleading to these criminal charges, and that all resolutions contain elements of restitution and community service performing graffiti abatement. As of today, 13 of the 16 defendants' cases have resolved with criminal charges, along with restitution and community service. They are also under court-monitored supervision for 12-24 months.

The liaisons have also been working on graffiti from a civil standpoint. The Graffiti Restitution Ordinance (10.07.055) went into effect on August 18, 2025, which allows CAO to take civil action against individuals who have committed graffiti property damage within the last three years, and includes a penalty of \$1,500 for each violation, along with restitution for damages to the victim. The liaisons have been leading a weekly meeting with the graffiti task force to investigate and photograph tags throughout the city, identifying the taggers, and finding evidence to support the tag has been done within the last three years. Since the ordinance passed, the liaisons have worked up and filed 25 suits against three prolific taggers, totaling nearly \$40,000 in damages. The liaisons have also worked up suits on three additional prolific taggers that have been referred to our civil unit and are being processed for filing. The

liaisons continue to track new tags throughout the city and are working to find ways to identify these taggers and file additional suits.

### ***Nightlife Issues***

The liaisons regularly coordinate nightlife enforcement efforts with SPD, the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board, and Finance Administrative Services to enforce liquor violations, after-hours nightlife violations, and other illegal activities associated with licensed or unlicensed nightlife establishments. Specifically, the liaisons coordinate information sharing between the departments/agencies, as well as provide guidance under the law when needed. Successful enforcement outcomes have occurred in some of the most problematic locations such as Caravel Lounge (one pending criminal charge and three After Hour Night Life violations), 2Sipps/Culture Lounge (two After Hour Night Life violations), and Evangadi Hookah Lounge (three after hour night life violations).

### ***Aurora Motels***

Motels on Aurora Avenue in Seattle continue to be locations for human trafficking. In July 2025, the liaisons, working with SPD, declared the Oaktree Motel a chronic nuisance property. The motel was involved with human trafficking on the Aurora corridor and also a hotbed for drug activity and gun violence. Once declared a chronic nuisance property, the motel immediately closed down and ceased all business operations. The motel owner listed the property for sale and plans to sell to a developer. Since closing the property, the human trafficking and associated violent crimes have decreased.

### ***Nuisance Properties***

Bar Capri, a business located in South Seattle, was declared a chronic nuisance in March 2025 based on the nuisance activities occurring on the property – most notably, a double homicide involving a firearm. This resulted in the business being permanently closed. The business served alcohol without a valid liquor license and was the scene of frequent disturbances to the neighborhood. The business owner signed a corrective agreement agreeing to vacate the property, forfeit the business license, and not own or operate any nightlife establishment for 18 months. The property owner signed a corrective agreement agreeing to evict the business, secure the property, and only reopen a new business once the property passes all City department inspections. The property is currently closed.

Urban, a hookah lounge in South Seattle, was a business with a tobacco license. The business was notorious for numerous reports of violent and illegal behavior, at times involving firearms. The business attempted to circumvent laws prohibiting such businesses from

selling alcohol by establishing a nonprofit agency to serve alcohol at the business using a special occasion liquor license. The business would regularly violate city laws by operating after 2 a.m. without any permit or license to do so, and would advertise their afterhours operation. The business was found to illegally serve alcohol and did not have proper SDCI permits, yet it operated anyway. The liaison objected to the LCB special occasion license applications, and ultimately, the business closed permanently.

A private residence in South Seattle was the subject of complaints from neighboring residents because of nuisance activity including numerous unknown visitors and vehicles, suspected drug dealing, and theft of utilities from surrounding properties. The property owner was discovered to be absent and did not have the resources to remove the tenants who had stopped paying rent for the past two years. The liaison notified city departments, which contacted the property owner and the property occupants to find a legal resolution. The liaison also met with the neighboring residents to hear and discuss concerns regarding the property. The property was vacated, fenced by the owner, and is currently under construction/repair.

### ***Retail Theft***

The liaisons play a major role in the CAO's approach to retail theft. The liaisons work with multiple local, state, and nationwide organizations to partner with law enforcement, retailers, and other prosecutors' offices to tackle retail theft issues. The liaisons were instrumental in the nationwide program, the Vibrant Communities Initiative. The liaisons attended weekly meetings with the goal of identifying the most prolific organized retail crime groups and problem solving how to best hold these individuals accountable. The liaisons also played a role in the Washington Attorney General's Organized Retail Theft Task Force by working closely with their counterparts at the various prosecutors' offices to ensure the impact of retail theft on the community was minimized.

SPD's General Investigations Unit puts together focused retail theft operations for local businesses experiencing high levels of retail theft. The liaisons work closely with the detective on these operations, to offer coordination between SPD and the CAO for arrests resulting from these operations. The liaisons alert the CAO filing unit of any upcoming operations, so they are looking out for these cases and expediting them for review. The liaisons have also accompanied GIU on these operations to gain a greater understanding of how these operations work, to observe law enforcement's various roles during these operations, and to answer any legal questions that may arise during the operation.

### ***Creative Solutions to Safety Issues***

The liaisons assist SPD with the enforcement of its Contract Trespass Program and Vacant Building Trespass Program. The liaisons provide the precinct with guidance and advice related to the proper enforcement of these programs, as well as provide information to the public regarding the application process or requirements of the programs. After several instances of gun violence in the Pioneer Square neighborhood, with direct ties to parking lots, the liaisons worked to include Diamond Parking-operated parking lots in Pioneer Square into the Contract Trespass Program. These parking lots agreed to participate in the program and to close their parking lots to the public earlier than before. This gave SPD the ability to make proactive contacts, resulting in at least one firearm being seized from an individual not lawfully allowed to carry, as well as a sharp decrease in gun violence in the area.

## Criminal Division Overview

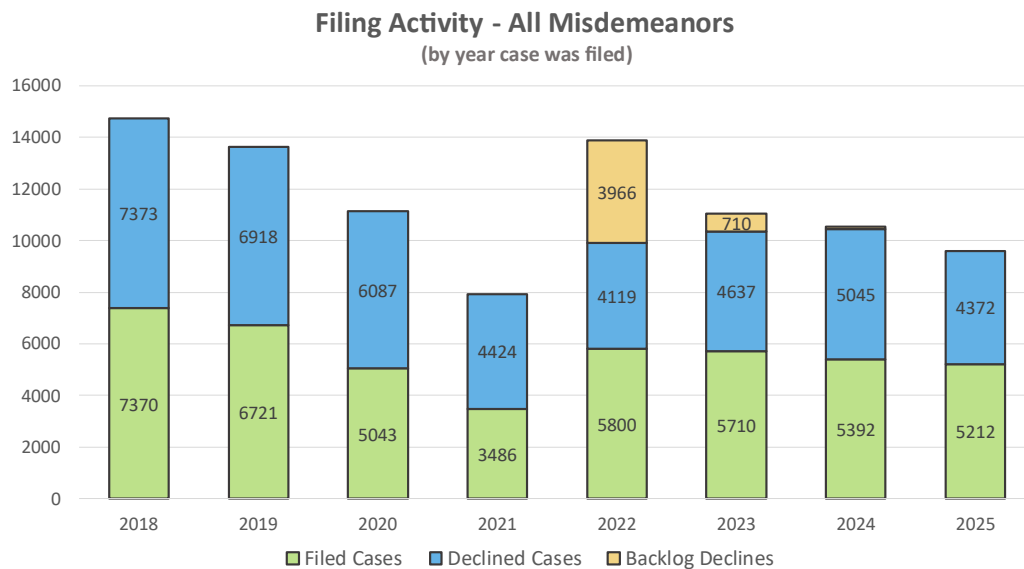
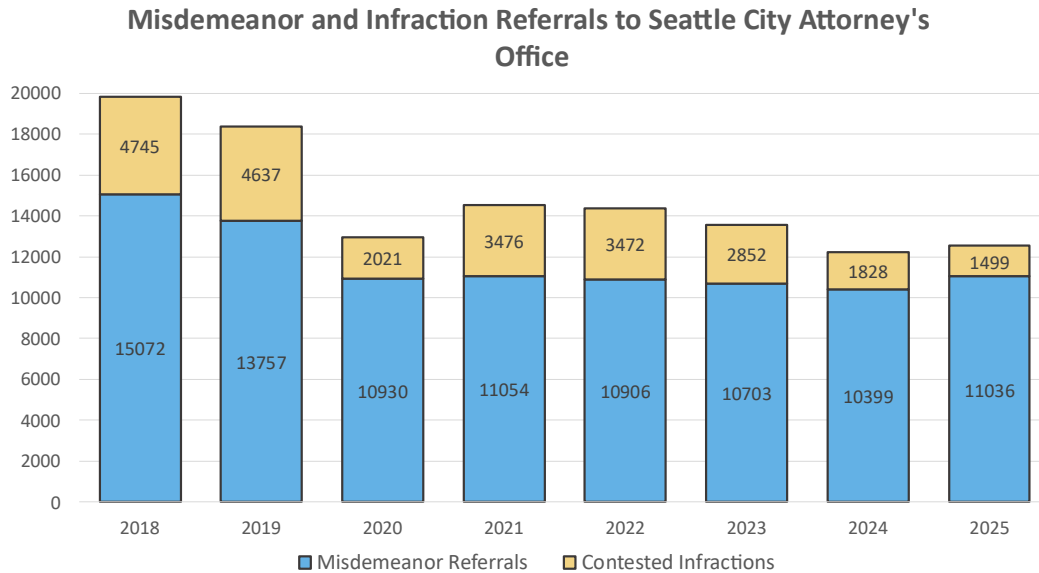
The Criminal Division is responsible for prosecuting all misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor crimes that are referred by the Seattle Police Department. The Division represents the City in contested infractions before the Seattle Municipal Court, as well as managing many forms of alternatives to traditional prosecution.

The Criminal Division is split into sections based on expertise and subject area:

- **Review and Filing Unit** – makes filing decisions on incoming police referrals.
- **Domestic Violence Unit** – prosecutes all domestic violence, sexual assault, and other specialty cases like child abuse or animal cruelty.
- **Trial Team Unit** – the main trial unit for everything but domestic violence and specialty court cases.
- **Specialty Courts Unit** – responsible for all cases in Mental Health Court, Veterans Treatment Court, LEAD, LINC, Vital, and the infractions unit.
- **Pre-File Diversion Unit** – qualifying individuals who complete a diversion program can have their cases declined.
- **Appellate Unit** – responsible for handling appeals and writs filed in King County Superior Court.
- **Case Prep & Prosecutorial Support Units** – skilled support staff to assist prosecutors.
- **Victim Advocates** – helps victims navigate the criminal legal system.

Annually, the City Attorney's Office typically receives some 11,000 misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor referrals from the Seattle Police Department and approximately 2-3,000 contested infractions from Seattle Municipal Court. In Fall 2025, a one-month study showed that at least 10 to 15 percent of the cases received by the Criminal Division for review were provable statutory felonies referred directly to CAO or declined due to the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office resource prioritization and filing/disposition standards. For this 2025 Annual Report, this section includes data primarily through mid-December.





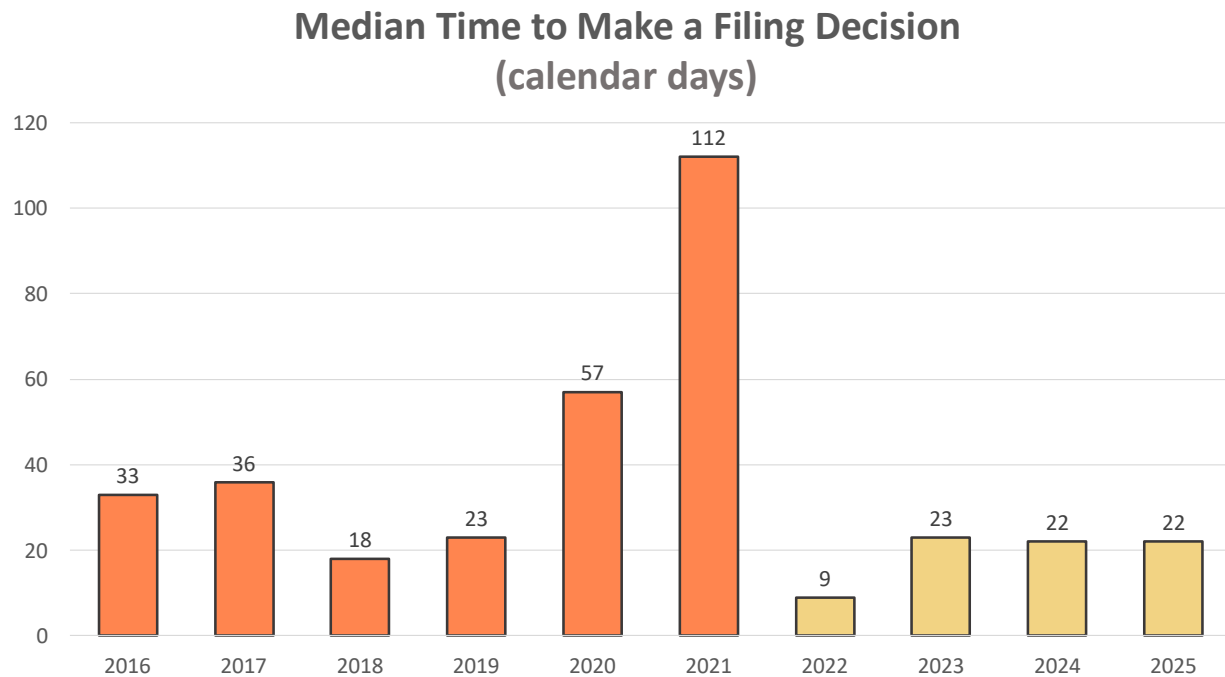
The 3,966 declined backlog cases in 2022 and 710 declined backlog referrals for prosecution in 2023 represent the cases from the previous CAO administration. These cases were unfileable largely due to their age.

Through Dec. 21, 2025, the Criminal Division filed 5,212 cases and declined 4,372 referrals from SPD. There are a variety of reasons a case might be declined, including:

- inability to prove the case beyond a reasonable doubt;
- inability to contact victims or witnesses without other evidence;
- completion of a diversion program.

# Criminal Division Highlights

## Close-in-Time Filing



Before 2022, the City Attorney's Office prioritized review of the oldest referrals. This approach results in a slower referral process and challenges to file cases due to difficulty in contacting witnesses and other evidentiary issues. This policy eventually contributed to growing a backlog of more than 5,000 referrals awaiting review, which further added to the difficulties in filing.

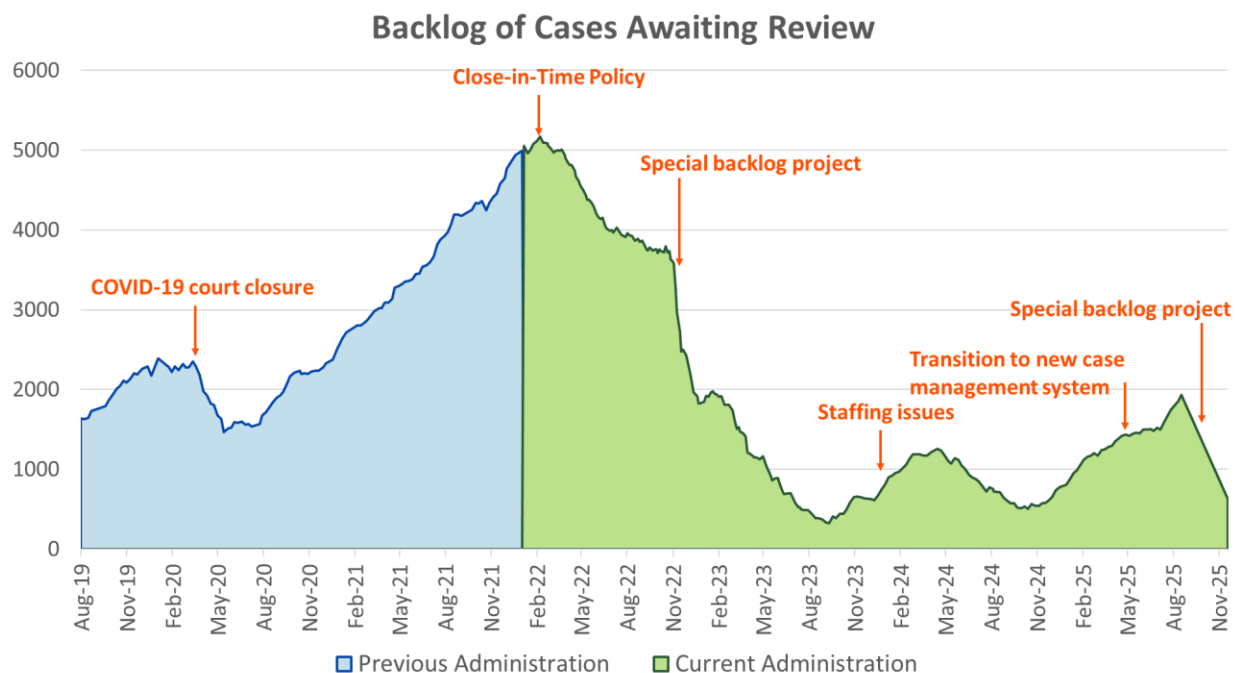
In early February 2022, City Attorney Davison initiated the Close-in-Time filing policy to provide more real-time accountability and to increase efficiency in Criminal Division operations. The policy goal is to make a filing decision within five business (seven calendar) days of receiving a referral, with extra time for domestic violence and LEAD clients allowed. The policy successfully reduced the median time to make a filing decision and created benefits throughout the Department.

In 2024, the average police referral took 15 calendar days to make a filing decision. Staffing issues continued in 2023 and 2024 which made it harder to meet the Close-in-Time goals. A single attorney on leave can have a substantial impact and it takes a significant amount of time to train a new attorney in filing. 2025 saw improvements in the first half of the year but a transition to a new case management system created a significant setback in Q3. For this Report, medians for 2025 are calculated through Q3, but don't include Q4 filing activity.

## Backlog Reduction

### **Cases Awaiting Review**

This is the largest and most volatile backlog in the criminal division, driven by both operational disruptions and policy priorities. The backlog in cases awaiting review that grew prior to the Close-in-Time Policy started sometime before August 2019 but little data exists before then. When the pandemic closed down the courts, the trial prosecutors were able to work on filing and reduce the backlog but that temporary reduction did not last and the backlog grew rapidly until the Davison Administration took office and implemented the Close-in-Time Policy. It is by far the largest area of backlog within the criminal division.

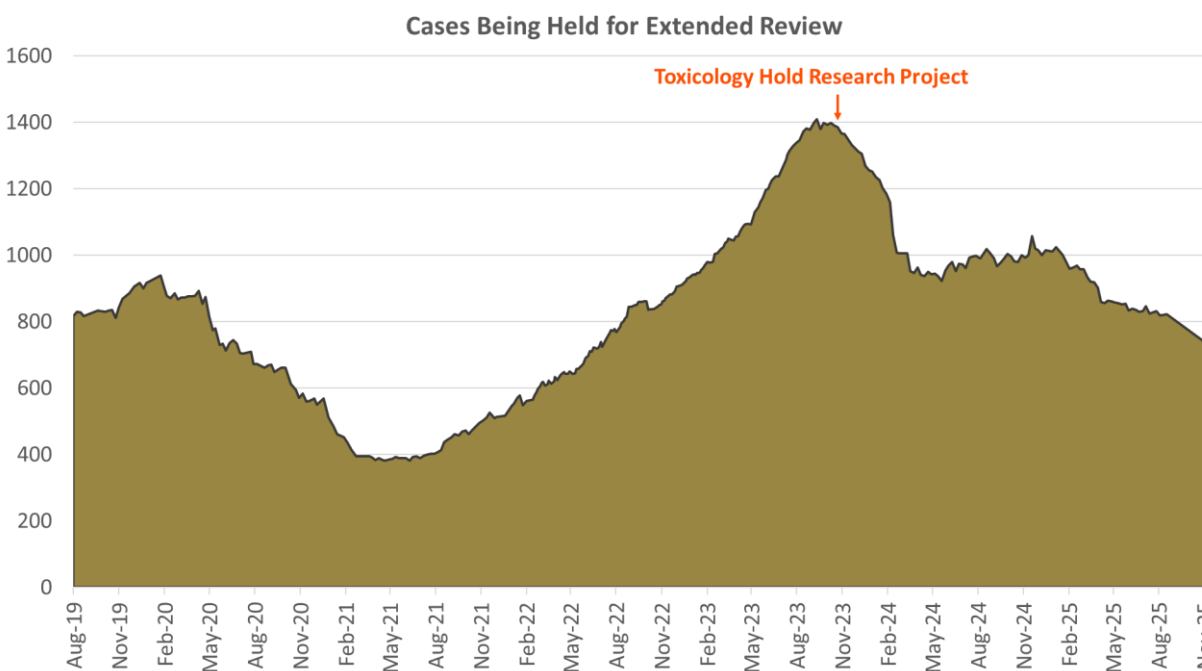


The new policy and increased attention to the backlog increased the rate of filing decisions and reduced the backlog. A special project was implemented at the end of 2022 to further accelerate the reduction focusing primarily on stale non-domestic violence and non-traffic cases that were nearing their statute of limitations. The City Attorney's Office started to transition to a new case management system at the start of 2025 which led to an increase in the backlog that accelerated when the system came online in late August of 2025. Another special project was initiated in November of 2025 to bring the backlog down to nearly 600 cases awaiting review.

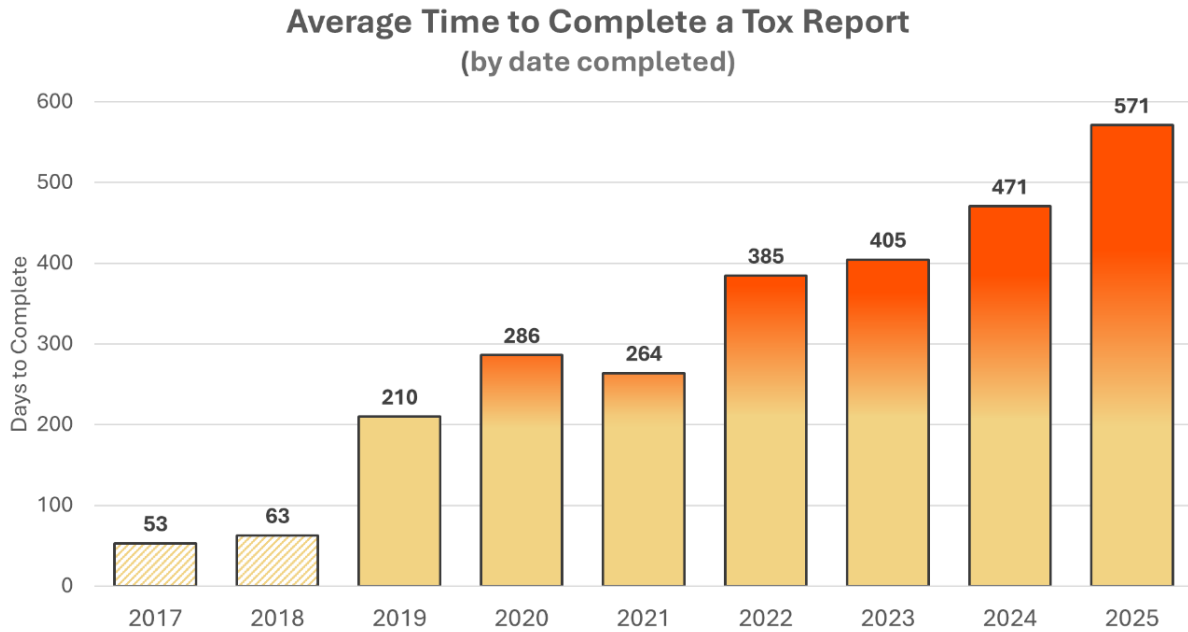
### **DUI Toxicology Backlog**

Nearly all cases that are held in extended review status are awaiting toxicology reports from the state toxicology laboratory which creates a backlog. This toxicology related backlog grew from May 2021 through the end of 2023. In November of 2023 with the backlog of cases

under review in a more manageable condition, the executive team launched a project to better understand the toxicology backlog.

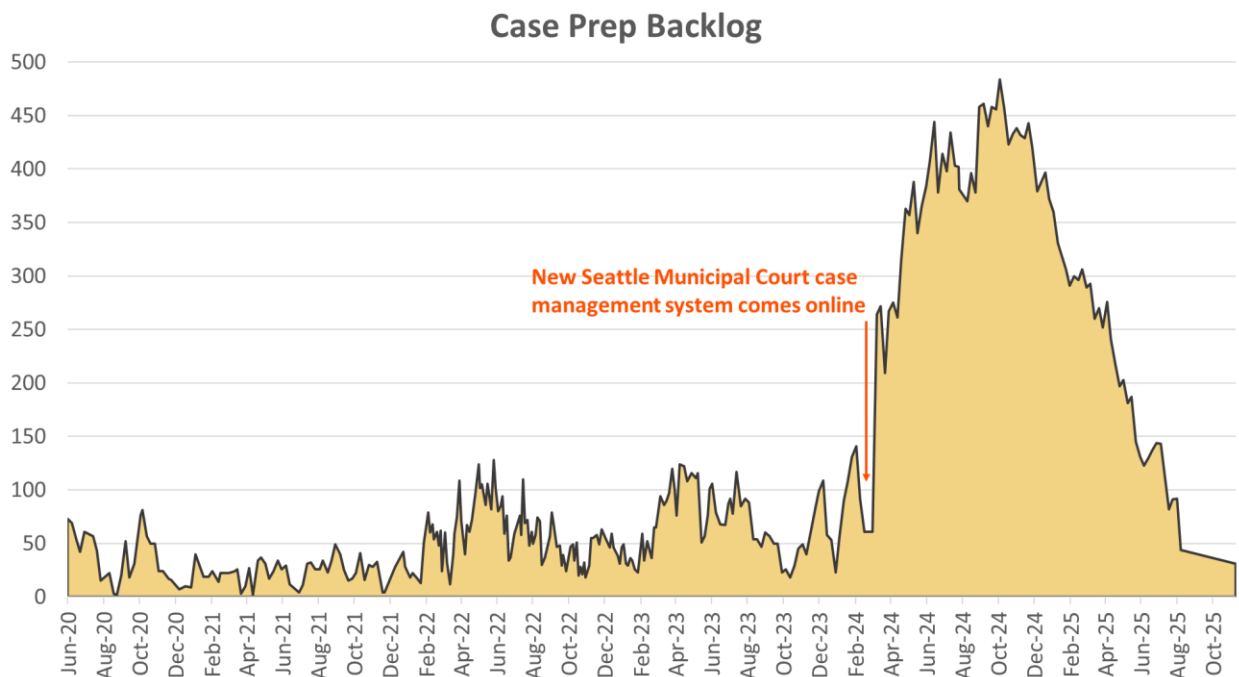


A primary factor was an increase in the prevalence of drug related DUIs compared to ones that only had alcohol. Toxicology reports are typically necessary to prosecute drug related impairment. Drug toxicology reports take longer and there was a growing backlog at the state's toxicology laboratory. There were also inefficiencies in the transfer process between Seattle Police and the Seattle City Attorney's Office. Those inefficiencies were corrected and policies were changed to try to file cases without toxicology reports through methods like the affected by prong of the statute or filing cases with drugs and alcohol but where a breathalyzer had been used. The City also lobbied the state legislature to allow for the use of private labs to be certified to run toxicology reports. The majority of the cases could not be prosecuted without the toxicology results so the backlog of cases being held for extended review remains large. The time it takes to receive a toxicology report has been growing.



### ***Case Prep Backlog***

Once a prosecutor makes the decision to file a case, the Case Prep Unit works up the case for the court. This happens quickly so the backlog within the Case Prep Unit was typically around 25 in 2020 and 2021 when filing activity was lower and around 50 for 2022 and later. In March of 2024 the court's new case management system went online and communication between the City Attorney's Office and the court was disrupted creating a backlog that grew to nearly 500 cases. Once adaptations were made, that backlog returned to normal.



## Addressing Drug Use

In 2021, the Washington State Supreme Court essentially invalidated the state's felony drug possession laws. Adjudication for these crimes was then the responsibility of the City Attorney's Office. City Attorney Davison worked with City Council, the Mayor's Office, and Seattle Municipal Court to adapt and build out a measured response.

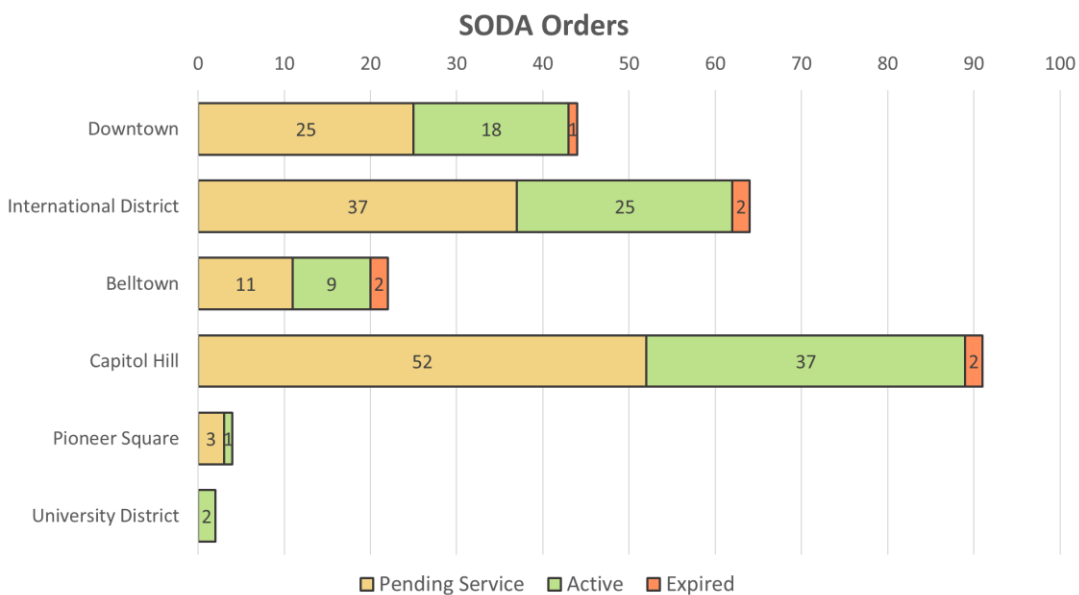


### ***October 2023 Drug Use/Possession Ordinance***

The City now receives approximately 100 referrals for drug prosecution each quarter. Rather than a purely criminal justice approach, the goal is that users will get treatment.

### ***October 2024 Stay Out of Drug Area Orders***

The SODA ordinance was designed to provide relief to those parts of the city most affected by drug use. After the usual gradual build-up inherent in virtually all new ordinances/initiatives, SODA gained momentum around May 2025 and has shown some success at reducing open air drug markets in some of the zones. To date, only four violations of the SODA orders have been referred by SPD, a hopeful sign of success.



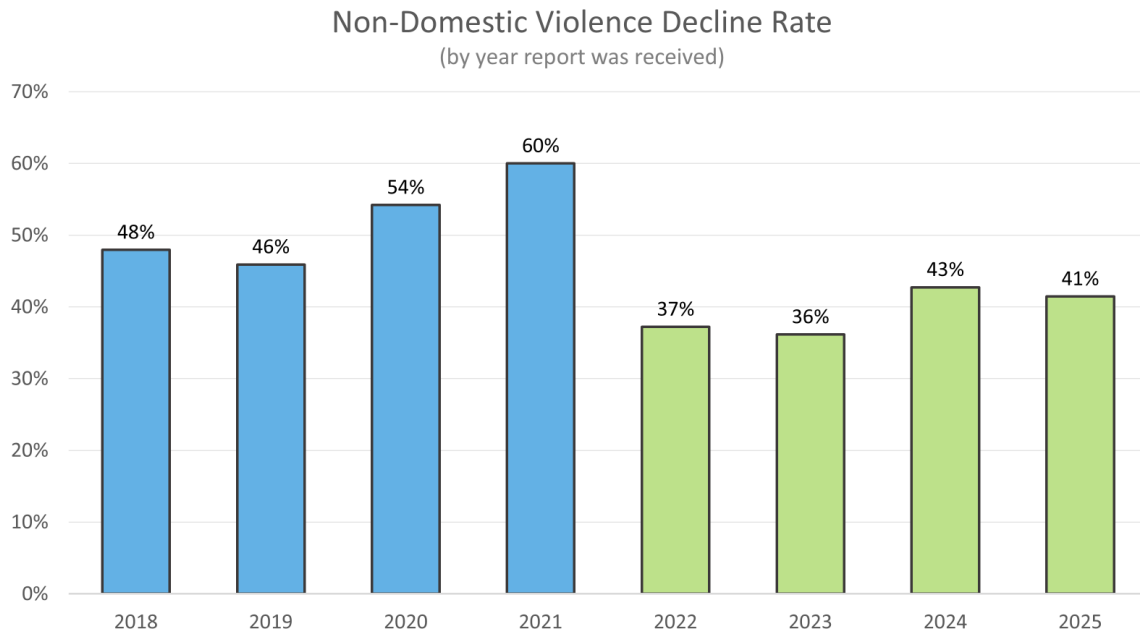
### ***August 2025 Drug Prosecution Alternative***

The City Attorney's Office launched an alternative to prosecution designed to incentivize rehabilitation over incarceration. This took significant cooperation between the CAO, Seattle Municipal Court, and the Department of Public Defense. To successfully have a case dismissed, participants must accomplish several steps within the DPA:

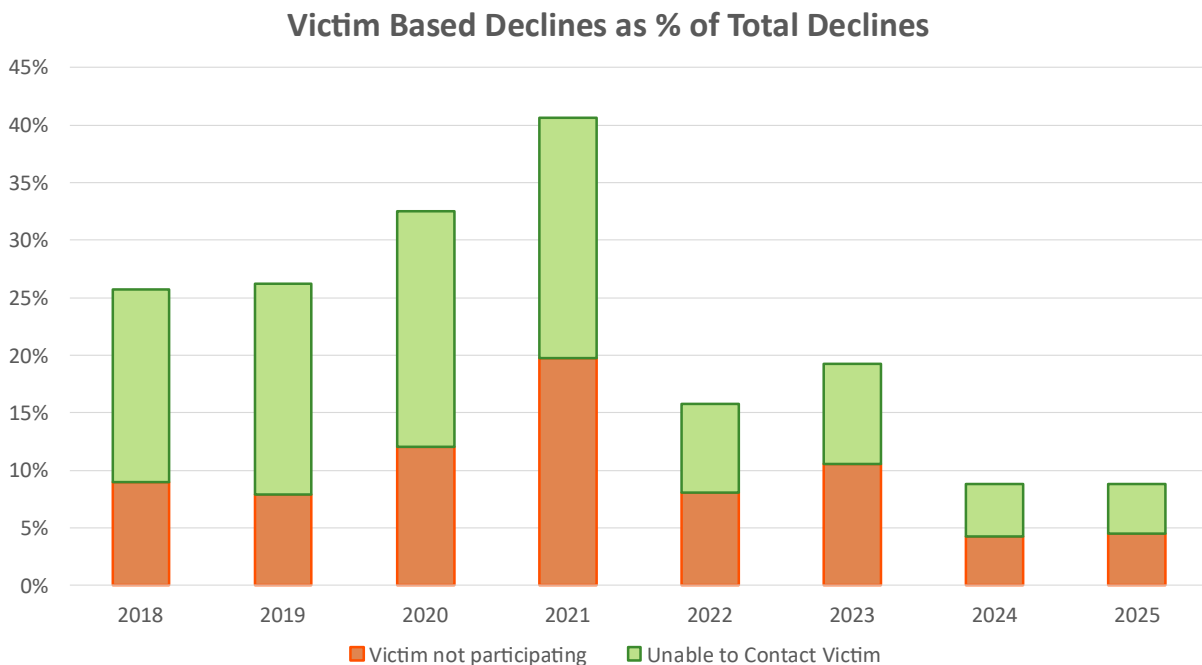
- Sign an agreement with CAO.
- Participants are referred to Seattle Municipal Court Resource Center.
  - \* Complete orientation to services.
  - \* Participate in substance use assessment.
  - \* Complete a drug test.
  - \* Where applicable, accept a SODA order.
  - \* No criminal violations for a 60-day period.

In the first four months of operation, the alternative has been offered in 99 cases, 57 of which have been accepted.

## Victim Engagement



Incoming referrals can be declined for many reasons, including lack of proof or victim/witness contact issues. In 2022, City Attorney Davison prioritized a focus on the recentering of victims in the criminal legal system. This, combined with the Close-in-Time Policy, led to a large reduction in cases being declined due to victims and witnesses not participating in the process. This continued in 2025.

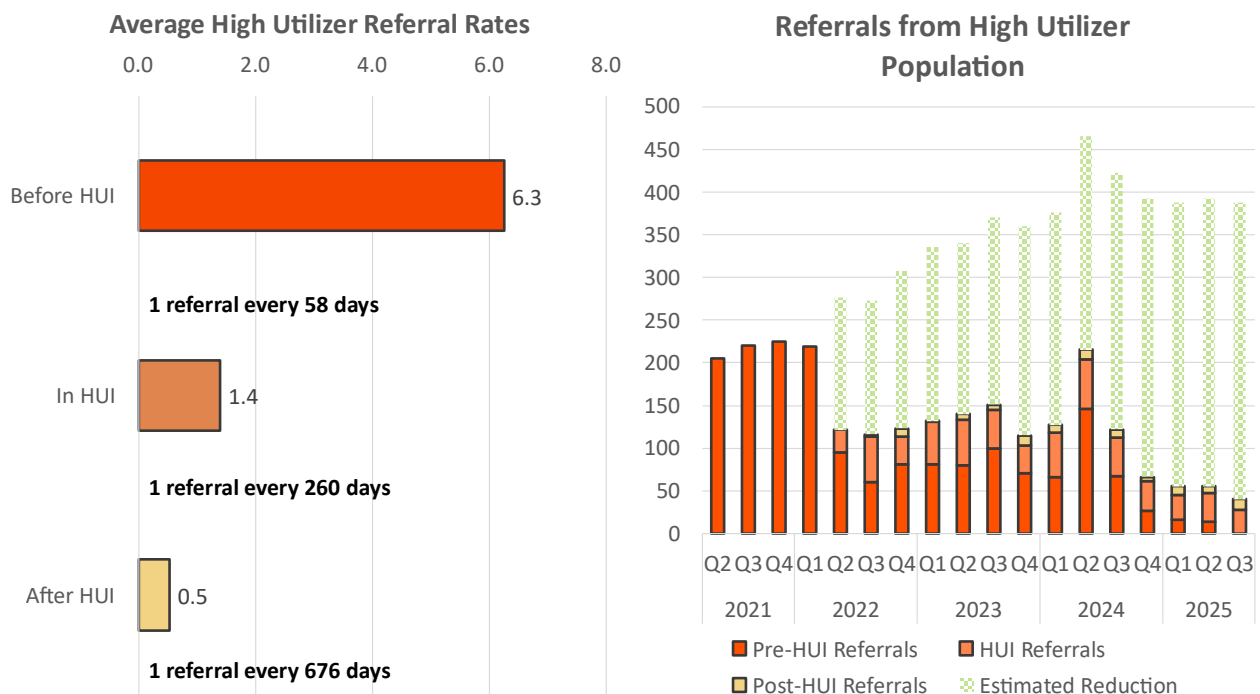




## High Utilizer Initiative

The High Utilizer Initiative was created by City Attorney Davison at the end of Q1 2022 to give special attention and accountability to the most problematic individuals committing misdemeanor crimes in Seattle. The initiative partners the City Attorney's Office with the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Seattle Police, and the King County Jail. The initial cohort consisted of 118 individuals who had been responsible for more than 2,400 police referrals to the City Attorney's Office over the previous five years. Additionally, each member of the cohort had been referred by police to the CAO at least once in the previous eight months. Each subsequent quarter updated the individuals in the initiative. Immediately, charge rates went up by almost 20%.

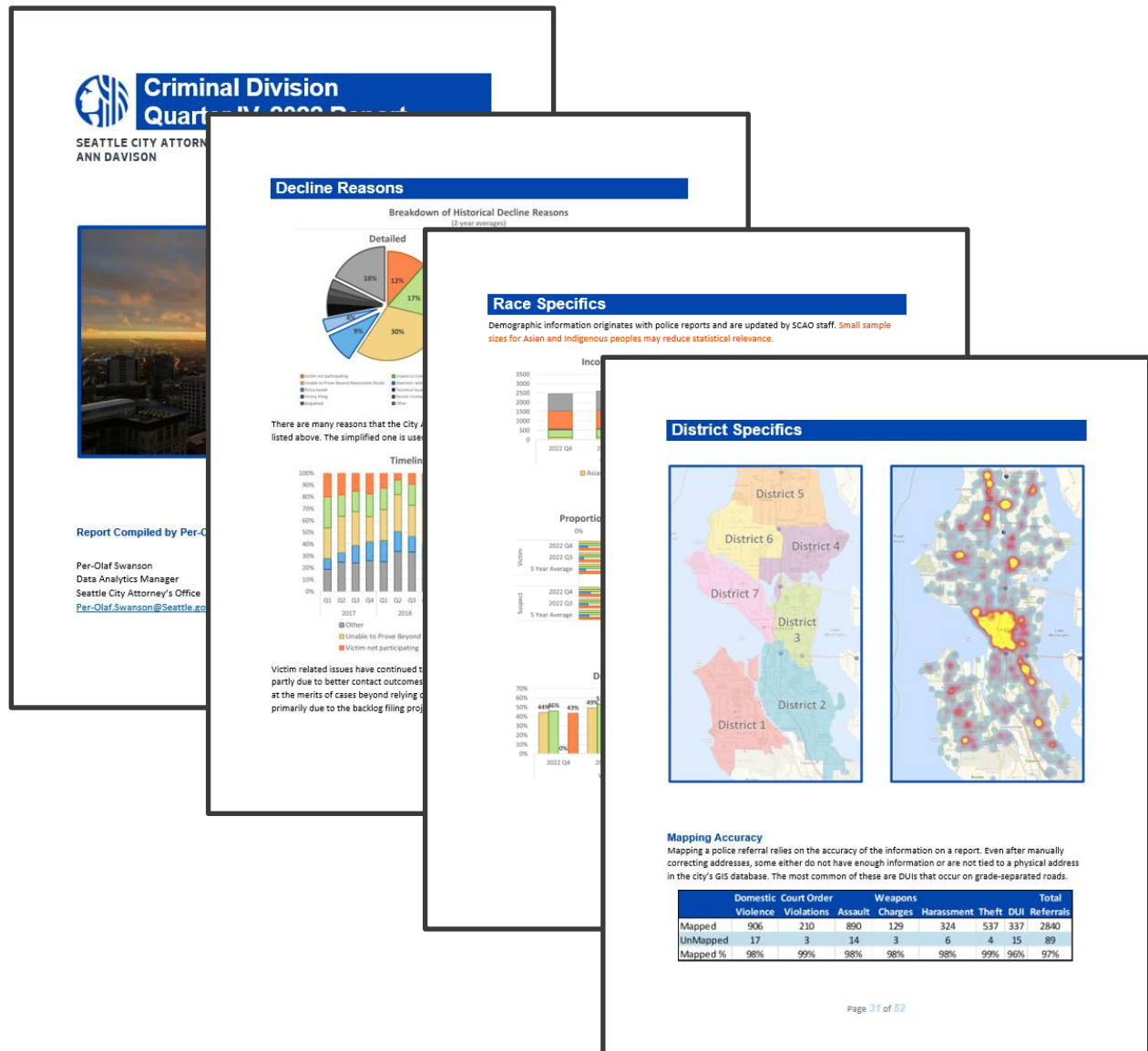
Thus far, the High Utilizer Initiative has created an estimated reduction of more than 3,500 police referrals to the City Attorney's Office between Q2 of 2022 and Q3 of 2025. This reduction is calculated by comparing referral activity of individuals prior to entry into the initiative with the activity rates while they are in the initiative and after they have exited it.



A prime reason for the success of the High Utilizer Initiative was the ability to book identified individuals into custody. Prior to the initiative, the King County Jail would only accept bookings for crimes against other persons and DUI misdemeanors. Treatment was offered to some who met the criteria, but most of them absconded and work is underway to improve that process to include in-custody treatment and planned re-entry after custody.

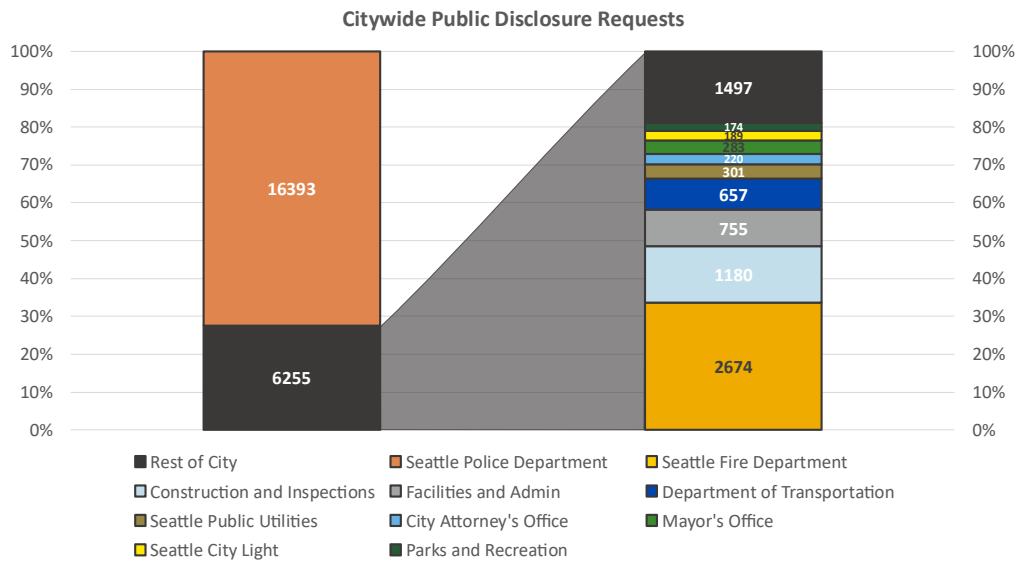
# Criminal Division Details

As part of City Attorney Ann Davison's commitment to transparency and accountability, comprehensive quarterly reports were created starting in Q1 of 2022. Each report contains approximately 50 pages of detailed statistics on the operation of the Criminal Division. They can be found on the City Attorney's Office website under [Reports](#).



# Public Disclosure Requests

## Citywide



The City Attorney's Office advises City clients on Public Records Act compliance and represents the City when its compliance issues are challenged in litigation. The City's PRA-related obligations remain a significant and growing body of work. In 2025, City departments received over 25,000 requests, a similar amount to 2024. The City Attorney's Offices has two FTEs to respond to the approximately 200 public disclosure requests in 2025. This remains a challenging area of work, requiring the latest knowledge of pending CAO matters, as well as staying current on evolving technologies.

## Seattle City Attorney's Office

