

Law Department

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<http://www.seattle.gov/cityattorney>

Department Overview

The department provides legal advice to City officials, represents the City in litigation, and protects the public health, safety, and welfare of the community by prosecuting violations of City criminal and civil ordinances and state law. The four department divisions are described below.

The **Administration Division** provides executive leadership, communications, and operational support for the entire department. It is comprised of the executive leadership team, human resources, finance, media relations, and information technology staff.

The **Civil Division** provides legal counsel and representation to the City's elected and appointed policymakers in litigation at all levels of county, state, federal courts, and administrative agencies. The Civil Division is organized into eight specialized areas of practice: Employment, Environmental Protection, Land Use, Constitutional and Complex Litigation, Government Affairs, Torts, Civil Enforcement, and Contracts & Utilities.

The **Criminal Division** prosecutes misdemeanor crimes in Seattle Municipal Court, provides legal advice to City clients on criminal justice matters, monitors state criminal justice legislation of interest to the City, and participates in criminal justice reform efforts, policy development and management of the criminal justice system. The Criminal Division is comprised of a Prosecution Support Unit, Case Preparation Unit, Domestic Violence Unit (prosecutors and victim advocates), Appeals, Review and Filing Unit, Specialty Courts Unit (Infractions, Mental Health, Veterans' Court, Let Everyone Advance with Dignity (LEAD), and Pre-filing Diversion), and Trial Team Unit.

The **Precinct Liaisons** support a program where attorneys work in each of the City's police precincts, providing legal advice to police and other City departments. In helping to address a variety of neighborhood and community problems, the precinct liaison attorneys coordinate with the Civil and Criminal divisions with the goal of providing a consistent, thorough, and effective approach.

Budget Snapshot

	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Adopted
Department Support				
General Fund Support	44,697,465	46,175,668	48,561,990	48,537,547
Total Operations	44,697,465	46,175,668	48,561,990	48,537,547
Total Appropriations	44,697,465	46,175,668	48,561,990	48,537,547

Full-Time Equivalents Total* 209.80 209.80 209.80 213.80

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

Budget Overview

Law Department

The City's 2026 Adopted Budget maintains core services for the Law Department (LAW). The department will continue to invest in programs such as prosecution of misdemeanors, advise on legal matters, and provide legal counsel to the City's elected and appointed policymakers in litigation at all levels.

The 2026 Adopted Budget is adjusted for minor Citywide and departmental technical changes. Included is a legislated change in 2025 establishing the Drug Prosecution Alternative in coordination with the City Attorney's Office and the Seattle Municipal Court. This ongoing program is an alternative for individuals charged with a drug crime or where an incident indicates a connection to substance abuse. Another change in 2026 will adjust revenue to fund 7.0 FTE in LAW and allocate costs across fund sources rather than solely to the Judgment and Claims Fund.

City Council Changes to the Proposed Budget

Council imposed a proviso on \$289,000 in the LAW budget to spend only for drug diversion work known as the Drug Prosecution Alternative (DPA).

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Incremental Budget Changes

Law Department

	2026 Budget	FTE
Total 2026 Endorsed Budget	48,561,990	209.80
Baseline		
Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	(188,326)	-
Net-Zero Technical Adjustments	-	-
Healthcare Billing Corrections	-	-
Removal of One-Time Appropriation	(149,210)	-
Adopted Operating		
Judgment Claims Fund Revenue Adjustment	-	-
Adopted Technical		
Ongoing Changes from Current Year Legislation	786,906	4.00
Bargained Annual Wage Adjustment to Base Budget	(447,798)	-
SCERS Retirement Contribution Rate Reduction	(26,014)	-
Council Provisos		
Proviso \$289,000 GF in LAW for Drug Diversion	-	-
Total Incremental Changes	\$(24,442)	4.00
Total 2026 Adopted Budget	\$48,537,547	213.80

Description of Incremental Budget Changes

Baseline

Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes

Expenditures \$(188,326)

Citywide technical adjustments made in the baseline phase reflect changes to internal services costs, including rates from the Department of Finance & Administrative Services, Seattle Information Technology Department, Seattle Department of Human Resources, and for healthcare and other central cost factors. These adjustments reflect initial assumptions about these costs and inflators early in the budget process.

Net-Zero Technical Adjustments

Expenditures -

Revenues -

These technical changes align planned expenditures and budget between projects and divisions. These changes have no net financial impact.

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Healthcare Billing Corrections

Expenditures -

This item is a technical change that aligns the budget for health care costs with where those expenses are realized. There is a net-zero impact.

Removal of One-Time Appropriation

Expenditures \$(149,210)

This item removes one-time salary and benefits appropriated to the Civil Division funding a paralegal for a memorandum of agreement with Seattle City Light. LAW used a temporary position when originally appropriated in the 2025 Adopted Budget to assist with collection on past-due accounts and now this work is complete.

Adopted Operating

Judgment Claims Fund Revenue Adjustment

Revenues \$(1,788,438)

This item changes the underlying revenue source starting in 2026 and ongoing from the Judgment and Claims Fund to the General Fund to pay for staff in the Civil Division that includes 5.0 FTE attorneys and 2.0 FTE e-Discovery staff. These positions were previously funded solely by the Judgment and Claims Fund. This change is necessary to better align the work being done by the staff in the Civil Division for all city departments and revenues collected funding. The revenues supporting the Civil Division budget are allocated over multiple funds for reimbursement based on usage. This allocation process is calculated at the beginning of each biennial budget process. There will be a General Fund savings realized in 2027 when the allocation rates are re-calculated.

Adopted Technical

Ongoing Changes from Current Year Legislation

Expenditures \$786,906
Revenues \$141,035
Position Allocation 4.00

This change includes ongoing budget and/or position changes resulting from current year legislation in 2025, including the Year End Supplemental Ordinance. This includes the Drug Prosecution Alternative program that was established in 2025 in coordination with the Seattle Municipal Court. This ongoing program is an alternative for individuals charged with Possession, Use of Controlled Substances, Stay Out of Drug Area (SODA) violations, and incidents where the facts of the case indicate a direct connection/nexus to substance abuse. The program is supported by an Assistant City Prosecutor and a Legal Assistant in the Law Department. This category also includes the addition of an Assistant City Attorney and a Legal Assistant to address the City's need to respond to actions taken by the Federal government including Executive Orders that put the City's federal grants at risk. Finally, it includes an increase to an existing MOA between the Law Department and the Department of Finance and Administrative Services (FAS) regarding support for tax related issues. This item increases the support provided by Law and reimbursed by FAS from 1.5 FTE of an Assistant City Attorney to 2.0 FTE.

Bargained Annual Wage Adjustment to Base Budget

Expenditures \$(447,798)

This centrally administered change adjusts base budget appropriations to reflect the proper Annual Wage Increase (AWI) increment for 2026, as outlined in the agreements between the City and the Coalition of City Unions for personnel costs. AWI increments are determined based on the average change in the local Consumer Price Index

Law Department

(CPI). This change represents a true-up between the forecasted CPI assumption included in the Endorsed Budget and the actual CPI data.

SCERS Retirement Contribution Rate Reduction

Expenditures \$(26,014)

The City's employee retirement system, the Seattle City Employees Retirement System (SCERS) is a defined benefit pension program funded by a combination of salary-based employer (i.e., the City) and employee contributions, and investment earnings. Based on the updated actuarial valuation for 2025, this item reduces the employer contribution rate from the endorsed rate of 15.17% to the SCERS minimum actuarial required rate of 15.06%.

Council Provisos

Proviso \$289,000 GF in LAW for Drug Diversion

This Council Budget Action (CBA) imposes a proviso on \$289,000 General Fund in LAW for drug diversion work known as the Drug Prosecution Alternative (DPA). The program is supported by an Assistant City Prosecutor and a Legal Assistant in the Law Department, funds for which were appropriated during the 2025 Midyear Supplemental Budget.

"Of the appropriation in the Law Department's 2026 budget for the Criminal Division Budget Summary Level (LAW-BO-LW-J1500), \$289,000 is appropriated solely for personnel costs related to drug diversion program activities and for no other purpose. The drug diversion program is intended to involve the following: 1) Referral of program participants to the Seattle Municipal Court Resource Center to complete an orientation to services, participate in a substance use assessment, and complete a drug test; 2) Where applicable, participants accept a Stay Out of Drug Area (SODA) order; and, 3) Participants agree not to violate criminal law for a 60 day period."

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Expenditure Overview

	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Adopted
Appropriations				
LAW - BO-LW-J1100 - Leadership and Administration				
00100 - General Fund	14,625,432	14,815,398	15,715,870	15,663,502
Total for BSL: BO-LW-J1100	14,625,432	14,815,398	15,715,870	15,663,502
LAW - BO-LW-J1300 - Civil				
00100 - General Fund	17,998,409	18,656,863	19,560,302	19,525,023
Total for BSL: BO-LW-J1300	17,998,409	18,656,863	19,560,302	19,525,023
LAW - BO-LW-J1500 - Criminal				
00100 - General Fund	11,318,039	11,888,858	12,432,047	12,509,318
Total for BSL: BO-LW-J1500	11,318,039	11,888,858	12,432,047	12,509,318
LAW - BO-LW-J1700 - Precinct Liaison				
00100 - General Fund	755,584	814,549	853,771	839,704
Total for BSL: BO-LW-J1700	755,584	814,549	853,771	839,704
Department Total	44,697,465	46,175,668	48,561,990	48,537,547
Department Full-Time Equivalents Total*	209.80	209.80	209.80	213.80

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

Budget Summary by Fund Law Department

	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Adopted
00100 - General Fund	44,697,465	46,175,668	48,561,990	48,537,547
Budget Totals for LAW	44,697,465	46,175,668	48,561,990	48,537,547

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Revenue Overview

2026 Estimated Revenues

Account Code	Account Name	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Adopted
333110	Ind Fed Grants	235,410	-	-	-
341060	Photocopy Svcs	19	-	-	-
341180	Legal Service Fees	4,337,718	3,045,777	3,137,340	1,947,937
341280	Records Svc Charges	1	-	-	-
341900	General Government-Other Rev	10,358,045	11,011,531	11,643,384	11,643,384
343320	Recoveries-Sundry	280	-	-	-
360690	Building/Oth Space Rent	51,600	-	-	-
397010	Operating Transfers In	-	434,000	458,000	-
Total Revenues for: 00100 - General Fund		14,983,074	14,491,308	15,238,724	13,591,321
Total LAW Resources		14,983,074	14,491,308	15,238,724	13,591,321

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Appropriations by Budget Summary Level and Program

Law Department

LAW - BO-LW-J1100 - Leadership and Administration

The purpose of the Leadership and Administration Budget Summary Level is to provide executive, financial, technological, administrative and managerial support to the Department.

Program Expenditures	2024	2025	2026	2026
	Actuals	Adopted	Endorsed	Adopted
Citywide Indirect Costs	5,906,460	7,094,645	7,534,736	7,489,324
Departmental Indirect Costs	5,460,389	3,300,801	3,451,343	3,500,441
Pooled Benefits	3,258,583	4,419,952	4,729,791	4,673,737
Total	14,625,432	14,815,398	15,715,870	15,663,502
Full-time Equivalents Total*	20.50	20.50	20.50	20.50

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The following information summarizes the programs in Leadership and Administration Budget Summary Level:

Citywide Indirect Costs

Expenditures/FTE	2024	2025	2026	2026
	Actuals	Adopted	Endorsed	Adopted
Citywide Indirect Costs	5,906,460	7,094,645	7,534,736	7,489,324

Departmental Indirect Costs

Expenditures/FTE	2024	2025	2026	2026
	Actuals	Adopted	Endorsed	Adopted
Departmental Indirect Costs	5,460,389	3,300,801	3,451,343	3,500,441
Full Time Equivalents Total	20.50	20.50	20.50	20.50

Pooled Benefits

Expenditures/FTE	2024	2025	2026	2026
	Actuals	Adopted	Endorsed	Adopted
Pooled Benefits	3,258,583	4,419,952	4,729,791	4,673,737

LAW - BO-LW-J1300 - Civil

The purpose of the Civil Budget Summary Level is to provide legal advice to the City's policy-makers, and to defend and represent the City, its employees, and officials before a variety of county, state, federal courts, and administrative bodies.

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Program Expenditures	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Adopted
Civil	17,998,409	18,656,863	19,560,302	19,525,023
Total	17,998,409	18,656,863	19,560,302	19,525,023
Full-time Equivalents Total*	105.30	105.30	105.30	107.30

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LAW - BO-LW-J1500 - Criminal

The purpose of the Criminal Budget Summary Level includes prosecuting ordinance violations and misdemeanor crimes, maintaining case information and preparing effective case files for the court appearances of prosecuting attorneys, and assisting and advocating for victims of domestic violence throughout the court process.

Program Expenditures	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Adopted
Criminal	11,318,039	11,888,858	12,432,047	12,509,318
Total	11,318,039	11,888,858	12,432,047	12,509,318
Full-time Equivalents Total*	80.00	80.00	80.00	82.00

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LAW - BO-LW-J1700 - Precinct Liaison

The purpose of the Precinct Liaison Budget Summary Level is to support a program where attorneys work in each of the City's five precincts, providing legal advice to police and other City departments. In helping to address a variety of neighborhood and community problems, the precinct liaison attorneys coordinate with the Civil and Criminal divisions with the goal of providing a consistent, thorough and effective approach.

Program Expenditures	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Adopted
Precinct Liaison	755,584	814,549	853,771	839,704
Total	755,584	814,549	853,771	839,704
Full-time Equivalents Total*	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

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