

2025-2026 Supplemental Department Questions

Please answer the following questions in a word document and return to Council. The answers to these questions will be provided to council as supplemental information. While not part of the physical budget presentation to Council, departments should be prepared to answer questions Council may have on these supplemental questions. If you feel that you have provided an answer in a previous question, please don't repeat your answer, simply refer to the earlier question/answer.

Strategic Goals

1. Provide your 2025-2026 strategic goals; How are they reflected in your budget request?

Similar to our request from last year, our Court is interested in finding a more efficient way of providing interpreter services to our Spanish speaking community. The need for Spanish interpretation continues to grow each year and we believe that a staff interpreter will provide more efficient interpreter services than our current arrangement. This staff member will also be able to provide non-court related services to our Spanish speaking community, furthering our efforts at access to justice.

Juvenile crime is rising in Washington State and we must be prepared to accommodate the increase in juvenile offender filings within our probation and detention units. Our court has made requests for increased budget for electric home monitoring, additional juvenile probation counselors and additional juvenile detention officers. These resources will be needed with the expected increase in juvenile offender caseloads.

National, state and local landscape:

1. What critical issues are you facing in your department/industry, and how are you addressing them?

Protection Order matters are rising sharply, and the complexity of these cases is also increasing. Recent legislative changes have caused more Protection Order cases to be filed with Superior Courts and our Court has significantly felt the impact. Our Court currently operates 10 or more calendars each week for Protection Order matters. This is double the amount from the beginning of 2022 when our Court was accustomed to 5 calendars per week for Protection Order matters. Protection Order matters are complex and deciding these cases correctly is critical for the safety of our community. Our Court is exploring options for additional relief including feedback to the legislature describing these recent impacts, additional pro tem relief and additional court commissioner positions. Significant rearranging of court calendars and scheduling has taken place in order to create the increased capacity for these matters to be heard. Of course,

this is at the expense of other matters that would otherwise be heard. Our court's capacity is finite. If additional court time is dedicated to a certain activity, a different court activity receives less time.

- 2. Are there federal, state, and local issues/mandates that will impact your department, operationally and/or fiscally. Please address what it is, the anticipated impact, and how you plan to mitigate it.**

On July 5, 2024 the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) froze juvenile intakes to their state institutions. This change was made with no notice to juvenile courts and caused major confusion. Legal action has been taken since that time which has resulted in DCYF resuming their intake process. Although a temporary solution has been reached, DCYF's state institutions are at critical capacity and we expect that DCYF will seek legislative relief during the 2025 Legislative Session. Those legislative changes will involve juvenile courts and have potential to create more work and impact for our detention centers. It is imperative that our County advocate against any proposals that divert DCYF work to the juvenile courts. DCYF has created this overcrowding issue with the state institutions. They need to fix it without creating burden for the juvenile courts.

Programs

- 1. With ARPA funding ending, what programs/services will be impacted and how? What is your plan for mitigating the impacts?**

Our only use of ARPA funding remains with our Courtroom A/V improvement project which is anticipated to last through the end of 2026. This is possible due to the project funding and related activities secured under contract.

- 2. What new programs are you proposing for 2025-2026? What need or efficiency is that new program addressing? How is that program funded for sustainability? What metrics are in place to determine effectiveness?**

This may not be considered a new program, but a new function of Superior Court that we are requesting is the addition of a staff Spanish Interpreter. This has been discussed earlier in this questionnaire and was communicated to the Council during budget development for 2024. We believe that this is the best way to provide expedient interpreting services to our Spanish-speaking community and in a way that maximizes cost efficiency.

- 3. Are there departmental change requests not in the Executive's Recommended Budget that you feel Council should consider including? If so, please provide the change request number and justification for the inclusion of the request.**

Competitive salaries are a constant topic among our work groups, especially after the Segal salary analysis was completed in 2023. Our union represented staff have been going through negotiations to determine which positions are in greatest need of reclassification. However, we also have non-represented staff that have no opportunity for reclassification without management directly asking for the same during budget development. The Executive's Office didn't entertain our request for reclassification of our Judicial Coordinator work group. This group of employees hasn't had a raise in over 20 years. To compound this frustration, other similarly situated positions across the County have received reclassifications or could receive reclassifications through the current negotiations. Please reconsider reclassifying this work group.

Our request for a staff Spanish interpreter position also is deserving of reconsideration. As mentioned last year and within this questionnaire, Spanish interpreter services and related costs have been exponentially increasing. Our interpreter budget has been significantly impacted by Spanish-related interpreter costs and we believe there is a better and more cost-effective way to provide the same with a staff interpreter. Please reconsider this new position for our Court.

Internal Operations

1. Please explain how you intended to meet the Executive's 3% Resource Alignment request.

Depending on the severity of the resource realignment, we plan to meet the budget reduction through salary savings and eliminating spending on select activities such as travel, training and supplies. If the resource realignment is more severe than we are expecting, furloughs and other more consequential personnel action may be necessary.

2. How are increasing Internal Service Rates impacting your department/programs?

The increase to our internal rates affects the Court in one primary area and that is our Court's Recovery Court Unit.

Our Court's Recovery Court Unit is heavily funded by the 1/10th of 1% Sales Tax. The internal service rates deplete the funding more each year, resulting in a narrowing gap between outward delivery of service and funding of business-related costs passed through to the Court by the internal rate structure.

3. To help inform Council on experiences around hiring and retention, please provide a list of all vacant position titles, position codes, FTE amount (1.0, 0.5, etc.), date vacated, and date first posted. Template spreadsheet

attached for convenience and conformity; if already tracking information in another format, that is acceptable as well. Please list each vacancy separately.

- 4. When was the last time your department implemented a fee increase? Do you have any plans to increase fees? Are your current fees established based on a full cost recovery model?**

Our Court only charges fees for Administrative Records requests and our Treatment Courts charge a participation fee. We do not plan to increase these fees since they are reasonable in their current amounts.