

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?

Our strategic goals for 2025-2026 include continuing to implement our long-range plan, build on our successes from 2024 with updated technology, improve our operation to be more accessible, efficient, and environmentally friendly and to provide a healthy and safe environment for employees and the public.

District Court rolled out our document management system in 2024, allowing us to move toward paperless operations. Our budget request for Network Administrator and HR Coordinator are directly linked to modernization, efficient practices, accessibility, and advancement in technology. The transition to electronic files requires technology expertise and support as we continually improve our operations. Our request for the Network Administrator and HR Coordinator positions, and reclassification for the Deputy Administrator and Probation Manager are directly aligned with our long-range plan to ensure diversity in recruitment and hiring, create a work environment that is inclusive and supportive, provide ongoing training, salaries that are in parity with similar judicial branch positions, flexibility of work schedules and maintain positive morale through improved recognition.

Modernization projects that support technology, document management and virtual hearings has proven to be vital to improving efficient practices and access to the Courts. We anticipate the implementation of the Statewide Case Management System (Enterprise Justice and Enterprise Supervision) in 2025 and 2026 which will provide greater accessibility to court records, electronic filing, and customer support that we currently do not have. This level of accessibility requires significant IT support, and the District Court simply cannot effectively operate five separate and very spread-out locations throughout the County, without at least two capable network administrators.

District Court recognizes that our employees are our greatest asset. Employing and retaining a diverse and talented staff is vital to accessibility and services for Snohomish County residents. Currently, the Deputy Court Administrator provides human resources management for the department and is also the Court Operations Manager. While the County Central HR department provides consultation to the department, they do not address individual issues or individual services that support recruitment and hiring, termination, discipline, track protected leave, update personnel policies and address Union issues for the department. Hiring a Human Resource Coordinator will reallocate these essential tasks and ensure we maintain a respectful and inclusive working environment while providing new hires and long-serving employees with the tools, resources and support they need to be successful.

Reclassification of the Deputy Administrator and Probation Manager is imperative to attract and retain the highest qualified individuals that support important initiatives, programs, and services for District Court. Recent recruitment efforts resulted in low applications of candidates with limited court and public administration experience. To attract and retain diverse and talented staff, equitable pay for work in parity with similar judicial branch positions, specifically within Snohomish County, is essential to support the vision of District Court. Without highly qualified employees the Court faces setbacks in continuing efforts to implement new programs and technology that support staff and county residents.

District Court facilities have been faced with inefficient mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems that were at life's end according to the MENG study conducted in 2015. In addition, the Cascade, Evergreen, and South Division buildings need complete interior remodels including updated bathrooms and kitchens, updated courtrooms that are ADA compliant, and safe modernized lobbies. For many people, the District Court is one of their only physical contacts with county government. Providing the public safe, clean, and reasonably modern buildings is a high priority for District Court.

National, state and local landscape:

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

The Courts continue to grapple with how to address the post Blake legal landscape both in terms of vacating old convictions and reporting to the

Administrative Office of the Courts. Further new legislation requires courts to assemble new programs that address drug-related offenses. Finding solutions and implementing programs to address these issues consume substantial staffing resources. We continue to seek grant funding for our therapeutic approaches. However, District Court needs the support of the Council in funding our current staffing requests as well.

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.

Due to the mandatory Statewide transition from JIS to Enterprise Justice and Enterprise Supervision, a Network Administrator is critical to this conversion. In the next two years, the court will (1) transition to electronic filing through a web portal, (2) replace our 1980's case management system (JIS) and (3) implement electronic tracking of progress of the petition for protection order. Legislation changes impacting how the court receives and communicates with participants in Protection Order cases will have a significant impact on operations and technology needs by 2026. RCW 7. 105.105 1(a) requires "electronic filing and electronic tracking of progress of the petition for protection orders by January 1, 2026. The new case management system and the requirement to provide a platform for communicating with litigants in protection order cases will require significant and extensive work from our Network Administrators who will assist in designing business processes that meet the needs of Snohomish County District Court and who will help implement the software and train users.

Programs

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

We currently have four LPA 1 positions and one Network Administrator that are funded by ARPA through September 30, 2024. The four LPA 1 positions have been instrumental in back scanning preparation of our files as we transitioned to a paperless document management system. Our Network Administrator is essential in our paperless transition, and integral to provide quality services to all five of our locations. We are requesting that our ARPA-funded Network Administrator become a permanent position to allow us to continue to improve the delivery of services through modern day technology. Our programs and services that will be impacted include our public website, SharePoint, our new document management system (Laserfiche), virtual hearings, and the upcoming conversion to the Statewide case management system, just to name a few.

The impact of losing the Network Administrator position once ARPA funding ends on September 30, 2024, will be extremely detrimental to our programs and services to the public. The court will utilize Trial Court Improvement Account (TCIA) funding to continue this position from October to December 2024 to maintain our progress on our paperless document management system and other technology related projects. If this position is not funded for 2025-2026, the workload will overwhelm our one Network Administrator as well as County IT.

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?

We will continue our paperless document management system (Laserfiche) and implementation of e-filing along with the Statewide Case Management System.

We are currently working with Superior Court to align all County Therapeutic Programs. With funding for these programs, we will be able to continue our partnership into the future.

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.

- Change Request 259: Network Administrator: 1.0 FTE – All reasons listed in answers to prior questions.
- Change Request 243: HR Assistant: 1.0 FTE – All reasons listed in answers to prior questions.
- Change Request 455: District Court Reclassification of Deputy Administrator & Probation Manager – All reasons listed in answers to prior questions.
- Change Request 353: Therapeutic Court Increase Positions from the 1/10 of 1% fund – Reasons listed in answer to prior question.
- Change Request 260: Interpreter: 1.0 FTE - District Court is required by statute to use interpreters in all court proceedings for participants whose second language is English. Over 10% of our community in Snohomish County is Hispanic. Since the pandemic, it has become more and more challenging to secure the services of a court interpreter in general, particularly Spanish Interpreters, to physically come to our courts and interpret for those in need of such services. English to Spanish and Spanish to English is the

most common interpretation used in our courts. As a court we have been able to take advantage of Zoom virtual hearings to handle some of these matters as the interpreters have been more willing to book jobs that are virtual than those in person. Additionally, the pool of court certified Spanish court interpreters is clearly shrinking and there simply are not as many available as there once was. Zoom, while extremely efficient for many matters that the court handles, is not acceptable for matters that require in-person interpretation. There is a strong preference for in-person interpretation. The communication is better, and it takes less time as simultaneous interpretation is used, as opposed to consecutive interpretation which must be used for virtual interpretation. Additionally, if the individual requiring interpretation is in court and the interpreter is virtual, private conversations with someone who is also in court is extremely challenging. If the individual requiring interpretation needs to see the front counter after court, it is also challenging. Court hearings require timely notice to all. It is not unusual for parties to be present and ready to move forward, only to find that there is no interpreter signed up for the job. In 2023, there were 53 calendars that did not have an interpreter signed up to interpret. Hearings without interpreters result in rescheduled hearings. In addition to being costly, it is detrimental to a party to have a time-sensitive hearing delayed because the court cannot communicate with them. Delays deny equal access to justice and can pose safety risks to parties seeking help from the court, are not a good use of resources, and are not an efficient way to serve our community.

- Change Request 263: District Court New Courthouse – One Location - The distribution of court services across five very outdated locations has resulted in inefficient space utilization and staffing and hampered judicial interaction. The outlying divisions do not meet current fire code requirements, current ADA requirements, or electrical/technical needs of the court. The buildings are no longer safe for staff or the public. A consolidated facility would greatly increase judicial efficiency and environmental efficiency while eliminating the need to do millions of dollars of deferred maintenance on the existing facilities. Supervision of staff and judicial caseloads could be spread evenly resulting in prompt and improved services to the public. In addition, a single co-location of services would allow the court to offer more work flexibility to employees in hopes of attracting and retaining qualified staff.

Internal Operations

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

The Executive recommends that District Courts resource alignment be adjusted to 1.5%. To meet this request, District Court will continue to review both the Court and Probation budget monthly, typically after the 10th of each month. The Administrative Analyst updates a very comprehensive spreadsheet, and both the Administrative Analyst and the Court Administrator review the completed spreadsheet, look for anomalies, and determine whether District Court is within budget, year to date. The spreadsheet is also presented to the bench at their monthly meeting for review. Discussions are held regarding expenditures. Following this process every month helps us to stay within budget, and control expenditures as needed. We will continue to use this process into the 2025-2026 budget cycle. As the 1.5% reduction will be built into our spreadsheet, we will closely monitor the status of our budgets every month to ensure we stay within budget.

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

We are cognizant of the annual increase in rates for all fixed interfund rates. However, we are responsible with our spending throughout the year to offset these increases and will utilize the same process outlined in the previous question to cope with these annual increases.

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.

Please see the attached Supplemental FTE Info sheet attached.

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?

Many of the fees charged in the Court are legislatively set. In January of 2023, we increased the fees for our driving courses slightly from \$139 and \$141 to \$150 to offset increased costs. We also changed the fee for a deferred finding from \$139 to the face value of the ticket.

Courts are specifically not a revenue generating department. Our ability to charge fees is largely set by the legislature and further controlled by Court rule and caselaw. *State v. Blazina* re-iterated that the Courts are very limited in the fees that can be assessed against indigent individuals.