

## **2024 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 2024 strategic goals; how are they different from 2023? In what way, if at all, are your strategic changes demonstrated in your budget request?

Our strategic goals for 2024 are to continue to implement our long-range plan (adopted in Spring 2023 and attached) and to build on successes from 2023, and to continue to make our operations more accessible, more efficient, and more environmentally friendly. Specifically, we will be rolling out our document management system, allowing us to move toward paperless operations. The new system will be more efficient, create consistency throughout our divisions, and more environmentally friendly, while also affording an opportunity to provide the flexibility needed to explore remote work opportunities for our staff. Our budget requests for an IT Specialist and HR Coordinator are directly linked to modernization and streamlined operations. Transitioning to electronic files is a massive undertaking that requires technology expertise and support to completely revamp our operations, and sufficient administrative staffing to provide support to our leaders to lead us through those changes.

### **National, state and local landscape:**

1. What are the federal, state and local issues facing your work? What risks or opportunities does that create for you in 2024 and beyond? What is your plan to leverage the opportunity or mitigate the risk? What support do you need?

The Courts continue to grapple with how to address the post *Blake* legal landscape both in terms of vacating old convictions and issuing refunds as well as adapting to new programs to address drug-related offenses. We are in discussions with our stakeholders about the best programs to put in place to address these issues. Finding solutions and implementing new programs to address these issues takes substantial staffing resources. We continue to seek grant funding for our therapeutic approaches. However, the District Court needs the support of the Council in funding our current staffing requests as well.

2. What, if any, new mandates do you have impacting your work? Are they funded or unfunded? What is the plan for accomplishing the work?

Please see response to last question. The Blake decision continues to impact our work. It is a funded mandate. We continue to have staff that work on Blake convictions and refunds, although some of the work has been transitioned to AOC. The change in protection order legislation is having a very significant impact on our work, with increased volume, more requirements for hearings and orders, and the inability to move work from one division to another division to even out division workloads, as the cases need to be heard where they are filed or where the Petitioner resides. This is an unfunded mandate.

### **Programs**

1. List programs, projects and services within your department funded through federal COVID/ARPA funds. What, if any, of those programs are you recommending ongoing funding for and what is the source of ongoing funding?

We currently have 4 LPA 1's and an IT Specialist that are funded with ARPA funds through September 30, 2024. The four LPA 1's have been instrumental in back scanning preparation of our files to prepare us for our move to a paperless document management system. Our IT Specialist was instrumental in helping us obtain grant funds for A/V upgrades and allowed us to expand virtual hearing options. Our IT Specialist is integral to our transition to paperless, and integral to being able to provide services to all five of our locations. We are requesting our ARPA-funded IT Specialist become a permanent position to allow us to continue to improve our delivery of services through technology.

2. For programs funded by COVID/ARPA funds, detail the plan to close out and/or transition those programs to an ongoing funding source in 2025 and beyond.

The 4 LPA 1's are temporary project employees funded to assist us in preparing files for back scanning so that we can move into the document management system. Those four positions were not intended to be permanent, although we would like ARPA funding through December 31, 2024. We are asking the Council to make our IT Specialist position permanent by funding it for the remainder of 2024 and going forward. Covid made it clear that court operations need to include access to virtual hearings in many cases. With 5 separate locations and 88.5 permanent FTE's, it is imperative that this position be funded to maintain court operations.

3. What new programs are you launching for 2024? What need or efficiency is that new program addressing? How is that program funded for sustainability? What metrics are in place to determine effectiveness?

The District Court will be launching an electronic document management system in November 2023 (pilot) and January 2024 (remaining divisions). This will address a variety of efficiencies including reducing our dependence of paper, creating uniformity of forms and processes throughout the divisions, reducing time spent filing and tracking down paper files, and allowing for possible flexible work arrangements. The program was funded from a variety of sources including the general fund, trial court improvement funds, and ARPA funds. We are requesting minimal funding in the 2024 budget to add portals and maintain licensing for our Laserfiche document management system.

4. If different than #3, what are your areas of significant investment? What are you not doing because of that investment?

Areas of significant investment include the A/V improvements and the document management system. We have used the TCIA, and grant funds earmarked for these purposes. We do not have sufficient funds for administration staffing, and those funds need to come from the County general fund.

## **Internal Operations**

1. What is your department doing to streamline processes or deliver services in a new way? How do your budget allocation requests play into these innovations? Are there ways which a different budget approach, e.g., several departments sharing a resource, could achieve the same or better results in a more cost-effective way?

The District Court has turned to increased use of technology to streamline or deliver services in a new way. First, largely through the use of grant funding and trial court improvement funds, we have equipped each of our courtrooms with substantial audio and visual equipment upgrades. These upgrades allow our users to appear remotely for several types of hearings and help to ensure that participants are able to see, hear, and meaningfully participate in court proceedings with less disruption to their lives. Similarly, we are revolutionizing our operations by adopting an electronic document management system. Our staffing budget requests are tied directly to both of those innovations. With increased technology reliance comes a need for increased technical support. Similarly, with changes in operations, we need our Assistant Court Administrator to be available to manage these changes; by allowing us to hire an HR

Coordinator, our Assistant Court Administrator will be freed up to lead those changes.

2. What, if any, hiring challenges are you experiencing? How is that affecting your level of service or internal operations? How are you mitigating those operational challenges and/or what is your plan for recruitment?

We are not experiencing difficulty with having sufficient pools of qualified candidates. Our biggest hiring challenge is that we do not have a dedicated HR Coordinator that can plan and carry out our recruitments, complete all necessary documents, and onboard new staff.

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 attached template.

We have only two vacancies:

- a. DCT3310R - Community Program Coordinator 1.0 FTE; vacated 4/7/23, posted 9/14/23
- b. DCT3301R - Community Program Coordinator 1.0 FTE; vacated 7/10/23, posted 9/14/23.

There was a gap between resignations and posting because we petitioned to reclassify these two positions which can only be done when the positions are vacant. We expect these positions to be filled soon with a start date of November 16, 2023.

4. What effect has the increase of inflation and/or supply chain issues had on your department? What, if any, services, or projects have you had to adjust to accommodate for this? (i.e., moving to outside contracted services, delaying of project starts and/or purchasing, redistribution of workload, etc.)

Supply chain issues have delayed all of our technology upgrades. Our A/V project took 15 months after grant funding was provided, due to supply chain issues, even with an outside vendor. Improvements to our network wiring took approximately one and one-half years with IT as the vendor.

5. When was the last time your department implemented a fee increase? Do you have any plans to increase fees?

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. While we do not have immediate plans to increase fees, we are conducting research to evaluate fees charged in other jurisdictions so that we can compare our fees and adjust if warranted.

6. Do you have any plans to do a rate/fee study? Are your current fees established based on a full cost recovery model?

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. Currently, we are conducting research to evaluate fees charged in other jurisdictions so that we can compare our fees and adjust if warranted.

### **Successes**

1. Take this opportunity to share one significant success in your department over this past year. What made it a success?

We successfully upgraded the A/V equipment in all our courtrooms. These upgrades have substantially improved the Court's ability to provide remote access to justice. The success of this project came from seeking out creative funding solutions, relying on the work of our ARPA funded IT Specialist and working with County partners. This project was primarily financed through a combination of grants from the Administrative Office of the Courts and the use of Trial Court Improvement funds. Having a second, ARPA funded, IT Specialist was vital to the implementation as was working collaboratively with facilities and County IT.

**Snohomish County District Court  
Long-Range Plan  
2023 to 2027**

**Our Mission: Snohomish County District Court proudly serves our community with integrity and respect while delivering to all persons equal access to justice.**

**Our Vision: Working every day to set the standard for Washington courts, a place where all feel welcome and have confidence in our system of justice.**

**Focus Area One: Promote a Diverse and Equitable Work Environment, and Enhance Staff Recruitment, Development and Retention**

The Snohomish County District Court recognizes that its employees are its greatest asset and without them, the Court could not function or thrive. The Court desires to employ a diverse staff that will bring their education, employment and life experiences, skills, and unique attributes and perspectives to the Court. Further, the Court desires to promote personal and professional growth in staff through development and training opportunities that will enhance employees' work experiences at District Court and prepare them for advancement. The Court seeks to pay its employees commensurate with their counterparts in other courts and seeks to provide non-monetary benefits that will allow a balanced lifestyle. The Court wishes to promote communication with staff and regularly seek their input and participation. Finally, the Court seeks to have staff that are content and are appropriately recognized for their work.

**Objective 1.1 The Court will ensure diversity in recruitment and hiring and provide ongoing support.**

Tasks:

1. Advertise in traditional and non-traditional recruitment forums and utilize alternative methods of recruitment.
2. Develop relationships with diverse groups to promote diversity in our recruitments.
3. Review and update interview questions for inclusivity.
4. Increase diversity on interview panels and invite outside individuals to participate.
5. Ensure our interview process is fair and equitable.
6. Ensure that all new hires have the tools, resources, and support to succeed in their job.

**Objective 1.2 The Court will create a work environment that is inclusive, comfortable, and supportive of all staff.**

Tasks:

1. Provide training to all staff on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.
2. Follow through on training. Ensure that all staff are treated with respect and that our work environments are congenial, positive, and inclusive.

**Objective 1.3 The Court will provide regularly scheduled and ongoing training that effectively prepares staff to perform their jobs. The Court will improve consistency in training among divisions. The Court will provide development and training for promotional opportunities.**

Tasks:

1. Conduct quarterly policies and procedures training for all staff.
2. Conduct off-site trainings for on-going topics, integrating participants from all divisions.
3. Create uniform training manuals for use in all divisions.
4. Establish a training fund which will allow employees to attend trainings and conferences.
5. Develop a leadership academy to provide staff with opportunities to obtain leadership skills.

**Objective 1.4 The Court will provide salaries that are in parity with similar CLJ positions.**

Tasks:

1. Review salaries every other year to compare with similar CLJ positions.
2. Request necessary funds in budget priority packages to be competitive with similarly situated CLJs.

**Objective 1.5 The Court will provide intangible benefits including flexible schedules and work from home as business operations permit.**

Tasks:

1. Establish a committee to research the feasibility of, and plan for, flexible schedules and work from home.
2. Implement flexible schedules and work from home as court operations allow.

**Objective 1.6 The Court will improve and maintain positive morale. The Court will increase and improve staff recognition.**

Tasks:

1. Conduct regular staff trainings that are engaging and educational.
2. Engage in team building activities.
3. Provide on-going staff recognition including kudos and awards.

**Objective 1.7 The Court will increase and maintain open and transparent communication among staff, management, and judges.**

Tasks:

1. Increase internal communication through Town Hall meetings.
2. Increase internal communication through SharePoint.
3. Increase internal communication through Court newsletter.

**Objective 1.8 The Court will prioritize and institutionalize staff input.**

Tasks:

1. Request staff input through anonymous surveys, staff committee participation, collaboration, and direct requests for input.
2. Recognize and incorporate staff input in decision-making, process improvements, and projects when feasible and desirable.

## **Focus Area Two: Maintain Strong Relationships Through External Communication and Outreach**

The Snohomish County District Court understands that success of the Court requires developing a solid network and strong relationships with outside individuals and entities ranging from the customers we serve to other courts and the other branches of government. We are committed not only to providing excellent customer service on a daily basis, but also to maintaining a reputation of distinction among other courts of limited jurisdiction and our justice partners. We hope to accomplish this through involvement, outreach, and transparent communication.

**Objective 2.1 The Court will provide excellent customer service and communication with court utilizers.**

Tasks:

1. Regularly review and update the public website to provide current and correct information.



2. Provide accurate and timely data to stakeholders.
3. Solicit and consider regular staff input regarding external relationships.
4. Create forms for the public in different languages that are easy to understand and readily available.

**Objective 2.2 The Court will strive to maintain a reputation of distinction among courts of limited jurisdiction and in the community at large.**

Tasks:

1. Judicial officers and court staff shall participate in statewide committees and organizations.
1. Share successes with stakeholders and media.
2. Engage with and develop relationships with local municipal courts.
3. Visit other courts to learn about innovative solutions.

**Objective 2.3 The Court will develop and maintain positive relationships with stakeholders.**

Tasks:

1. Regularly attend cabinet and other Executive meetings.
2. Regularly attend Council and subcommittee meetings.
3. Hold stakeholder meetings which include prosecution, defense, interpreters, law enforcement agencies, staff, security, Executive staff, Council members, cities, tribes, and community representatives.
4. Engage with mental health and social service providers, bar associations and jurors.
5. Maintain and improve relationships by providing data-driven proposals and metrics.

**Objective 2.4 The Court will be accurate and transparent in all communications.**

Tasks:

1. Maintain accurate data and metrics.
2. Continue to evaluate communications for accuracy and transparency.

### **Focus Area Three: Place an Emphasis on Planning and on Development of the Management Structure**

The Snohomish County District Court understands the importance of an effective and efficient court system. A meaningful leadership structure, full participation of all personnel, and programs that meet the needs of the community will support this goal.

Further, the proper training of all staff and the sharing of ideas will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Court.

**Objective 3.1 The Court will build a leadership structure that meets the Court's needs.**

Tasks:

1. Add judicial positions to meet increased needs and balance caseloads among the divisions.
2. Add a Human Resources (HR) position to ensure District Court HR has the necessary staffing to meet HR needs and responsibilities.
3. Review and consider the leadership structure on a regular basis; realign and adjust as necessary to meet the needs of the Court and to address new demands.
4. Train for succession planning at all levels of the Court structure.

**Objective 3.2 The Court will establish formal committees that meet regularly to plan and implement goals related to the effective and efficient running of the Court.**

Tasks:

1. Establish the following committees, involving and assigning judges and staff from all levels of the Court:
  - a. The Template Committee will develop templates and forms.
  - b. The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Committee will address all aspects of DEIA in the running of the Court, including holding regular DEIA training. The committee will review and implement policies to ensure that individuals with disabilities can access the Court and our proceedings.
  - c. The Interpreter Committee will select forms and templates for translation and regularly update the translations as needed, determine for which languages forms translation is needed the most to assist court users, ensure we are using appropriate interpreter equipment, and expand our resource list and protocols for rare languages.
  - d. The Safety Committees placed within each court division, as required by Labor & Industries, will address the safety needs of each facility and all court users.

- e. The Technology Committee will address our Public Website; SharePoint; Document Management System; and Case Management System. The work of this committee could be extremely large and require subcommittees.
  - f. The Budget Committee will hold regular meetings to review adherence to the current budget, propose solutions for budget issues, and prepare the proposed budget for the next year.
  - g. The Long-Range Planning and Long-Range Implementation Committee(s) will ensure the development, transmission, and implementation of the Long-Range Plan.
  - h. The Facilities and Siting Committee will ensure that our facilities are safe, clean, and updated as needed, and will ensure that any reconfiguration of our current court's physical locations meets all the needs of the Court.
2. Designate bench advisors or form ad hoc committees for the following areas:
- a. Probation, Community Programs and Therapeutic Courts to provide guidance for these programs.
  - b. Court Education to provide and budget for staff training, education, and leadership.

**Objective 3.3 The Court will enhance existing programs for Probation, Dispute Resolution, and Jail Alternatives.**

Tasks:

- 1. Add Thinking for Change (T4C) to Probation classes, a cognitive-behavioral program that includes cognitive restructuring, social skills development, and the development of problem-solving skills.
- 2. Determine whether additional therapeutic courts should be added, including Veteran's Court, DUI Court, Drug Court, and Community Court. Create implementation plans for proposed additional therapeutic courts.
- 3. Continue to seek additional funding for existing therapeutic courts and for additional therapeutic courts.

**Objective 3.4 The Court will support judicial education and augment pro tem training.**

Tasks:

- 1. Include regular presentations at bench meetings for topics of concern, e.g., bail reform and protection orders.
- 2. Expand pro tem recruitment.

3. Improve communication with pro tems.
4. Establish a mentoring program for pro tems.
5. Create an online pro tem bench book.

**Objective 3.5 The Court will monitor and manage caseload performance.**

Tasks:

1. Regularly create and share caseload reports.
2. Review reports to measure performance.
3. Maintain or improve performance to meet Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) standards.

## **Focus Area Four: Establish Consistent Practices and Procedures and Promote Uniformity**

The Snohomish County District Court appreciates that all four court locations are one District Court and that processes and procedures, equitable access to justice, and court services should be available and consistent in all locations. The Court understands that it is more efficient and cost effective, and a better use of public resources, to develop one set of practices and procedures to be used throughout the Court. Further, the Court recognizes that there may be a public benefit to future siting in one location. For this reason, the Court desires to explore this option.

**Objective 4.1 The Court will consider and plan for future siting options for District Court.**

Tasks:

1. Make decisions and set goals for District Court siting recommendations.
2. Meet with stakeholders and other branches of government to discuss siting after developing a plan.

**Objective 4.2 The Court will create and implement division consistency through uniform practices and procedures.**

Tasks:

1. Create universal practice and procedure manuals.
2. Create uniform calendars.
3. Create universal handouts for unrepresented litigants.

4. Create rules for uniform data entry.
5. Establish style guidelines and branding.
6. Apply policies and procedures uniformly in all divisions.

**Objective 4.3 The Court will design and use uniform electronic forms and templates.**

Tasks:

1. Create uniform electronic court templates for court-wide, universal use.
2. Create uniform electronic probation and therapeutic court templates.
3. Create uniform electronic administrative forms.

**Objective 4.4 The Court will be innovative and maximize efficiency and cost-effectiveness without sacrificing access to justice.**

Tasks:

1. Evaluate data prior to making decisions.
2. Evaluate prospective decisions for impact on access to justice.
3. Explore processes of other courts to promote innovation and efficiency.

**Objective 4.5 The Court will create equitable workloads among divisions.**

Tasks:

1. Utilize existing data sources to measure workloads in each division.
2. Adjust caseloads as needed to balance judicial and staff workloads from division to division.
3. Review workloads and adjust on a regular basis.
4. Take advantage of electronic files to distribute workload equitably.
5. Evaluate workload sharing with Superior Court and its impact on equitable District Court allocations.

## **Focus Area Five: Maintain Safe and Healthy Facilities**

The Snohomish County District Court recognizes that providing healthy and safe facilities is a pre-requisite to the administration of justice. The Court will advocate for facility improvements that improve both the safety and efficiency of court facilities.

**Objective 5.1 The Court will strive to make improvements to our facilities to ensure the health and safety of our staff, judges, court participants and the public.**

Tasks:

1. Actively engage with the County Court Security Committee to create a courthouse facilities safety plan.
2. Engage with the Sheriff's Office regarding marshal staffing at each division.
3. Advocate for facilities improvements with Facilities and through budget requests to the Executive and Council.
4. Purchase and install ergonomic workstations for staff.
5. Modernize HVAC systems.
6. Reconfigure in-court workstations to create safer egress.
7. Bring fire protection systems up to current code.
8. Remodel restrooms.
9. Install security cameras as needed.
10. Remodel kitchens.
11. Install new carpets.
12. Remove file storage when document management system is implemented.

**Objective 5.2 The Court will meet ADA requirements and endeavor to meet ADA needs even when not required.**

Tasks:

1. Research ADA requirements for buildings and courts.
2. Make "low hanging fruit" adjustments to existing facilities to meet ADA requirements.
3. Initiate priority packages to bring facilities up to current codes as to ADA requirements and needs.

## **Focus Area Six: Implement Modern Technology**

Snohomish County District Court understands the importance of technology in this day and age to effectively conduct the Court's work. Further, the Court understands that technology can be invaluable in helping the community access the services the Court provides. The Court is committed to having

current and reliable technology that meets the specific needs of the Court and its users. Further, the Court is committed to proper training of all judicial officers and staff in the use of its technology.

**Objective 6.1 The Court will install and use new technology in our courthouses and courtrooms to achieve modern standards and to improve in-court and virtual hearing experiences.**

Tasks:

1. Purchase and implement a document management system to transition to electronic files.
2. Employ the Odyssey Case Management System when provided by AOC.
3. Purchase and install new audio and video equipment.
4. Ensure we are using the best internet and broadband necessary to meet technology requirements.
5. Purchase and install listening devices and document readers.
6. Install and refine the use of a new recording system for hearing recordings.

**Objective 6.2 The Court will improve communication technology for court users and the public.**

Tasks:

1. Provide text alerts for court hearing dates and probation meetings.
2. Increase and improve the use of social media.

**Objective 6.3 The Court will continually improve and update our public website and implement additional features.**

Tasks:

1. Improve online resources for requesting court hearing recordings, court records and public records.
2. Allow online video hearings when appropriate.
3. Offer online scheduling for court hearings.
4. Offer online submission of protection order petitions and other forms.
5. Improve the online payment system.
6. Allow online contested and mitigation infraction hearings on written statements.

**Objective 6.4 The Court will utilize technology to improve internal court communication.**

Tasks:

1. Design and implement a SharePoint website for effective communication and tool-sharing for internal court users.
2. Continually update and improve the website with updated communication, forms, links, and resources.

**Objective 6.5 The Court will provide extensive technology training for District Court.**

Tasks:

1. Establish methods to train judicial officers and staff on all new technology.
2. Provide extensive technology training for pro tem judges so that use of new technology is consistent throughout District Court.
3. Create video tutorials for new processes and software.

**Objective 6.6 The Court will improve access to data and metrics.**

Tasks:

1. Learn how to use current data sources.
2. Learn how to use new data sources when they become available.