

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 Court continues to develop creative and innovative ways to address access to justice, including our request for a new Staff Spanish Interpreter position. This position will provide Spanish interpreting within our courtrooms and also provide Spanish customer service in our office and over the phone. We also envision this position holding regular “drop-in” hours each week for Spanish speaking members of our community to ask questions and speak with our administration team. This position can also assist with our document translation efforts. All of these duties will further provide access for our Spanish speaking community members, a group of citizens that continues to grow each year.

Our Court continues to find new ways of incorporating technology within our operations. Technology creates efficiency, supports access to justice and provides good customer service to our public. We are in the early stages of a multi-year courtroom audio/video upgrade project. This project will outfit all trial courtrooms with current audio/video technology, including the use of ZOOM and remote appearance for our courtroom proceedings. The improvements also provide enhanced disability accommodations and places our court in a position to keep operations running if we ever encounter another pandemic or environmental disaster that limits the public from being in our courthouse.

Enhancing security within our courthouses is an essential need that must be addressed as soon as possible. An armed gunman entered our downtown courthouse lobby on December 12, 2022. This event ended without any casualties, but it was a grave reminder of how vulnerable our courthouses can be and the consequences of extremely unsatisfied patrons of our court. We have started a conversation with our stakeholders about the importance of courthouse safety and forthcoming improvements. In fact, we have hired a security consultant to perform a site assessment of our courthouses so we may develop a plan to provide the safest environment possible.

Finally, it is no secret that good talent is proving harder to find and more expensive. This was reflected within the Class and Compensation Study completed by the Segal

Group in the Spring of 2023. We are experiencing significant challenges with recruiting and retention in nearly every work unit of our court. We look forward to the conversations with the County Council and County Executive to improve recruitment and retention efforts, including salary adjustments.

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 lack of Spanish certified interpreters is causing delay with our court proceedings and increasing expenses. Interpreters are required by law to assist non-English speaking individuals with court activities. Interpreters are harder to find, harder to schedule and demanding more compensation. In some instances, our Court has had to embrace remote interpreting arrangements and accept non-certified interpreters that can demonstrate acceptable qualification both of which are disfavored under the law. We will continue to foster good partnerships with our local interpreters, and we are requesting immediate relief through our request for a Staff Spanish Interpreter.

The Washington State Legislature continues to take an interest in the ways our Superior Courts are performing business. Increasing juror pay is a popular topic that we all agree must be addressed as soon as possible. We are hopeful that we can convince the legislature to increase Snohomish County juror pay and continue working towards juror pools that reflect the demographics of our community.

- 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?**

The Legislature's recent amendments to our protection order laws have caused more time, consideration, and procedural changes in conjunction with these types of proceedings. The addition of our 6th commissioner this year has provided some relief and we will continue to monitor impacts of any related legislation in the upcoming session.

During the pandemic, our Washington State Supreme Court temporarily suspended juvenile courts from issuing warrants for youth that demonstrate self-endangering behavior. The Supreme Court's change to Washington State Juvenile Court Rule 7.16 (JuCr 7.16) provided that warrants may be issued only for reasons of youth behavior that compromised public safety. As you can imagine, our Superior Court along with others around the state were opposed to this change. Despite tremendous advocacy from the superior courts to return JuCr 7.16 to its original form, this month the Supreme

Court permanently adopted the changes. This will undoubtedly result in less opportunities for our Juvenile Court to intervene in the self-destructive behavior of some of the youth in our community. We will continue to support our youth and families in the best ways possible, even when our most important tools are stripped from us.

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?**

Construction for “Department 13” or Courtroom 3D has started this Fall. We expect that this project will be completed sometime around the beginning of 2024. This project is paid with ARPA funding and is a much-needed resource for our court.

Our courtroom A/V upgrade project described in the above-mentioned Strategic Goals section is also paid with ARPA funding.

Courtroom 3D and our Courtroom A/V project are essential to our court operations, and we strongly recommend that ARPA appropriations for these projects remain intact.

- 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.**

Neither of our ARPA projects require committed funding in an ongoing fashion. They are both capital improvement projects.

- 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?**

We are continuing to explore Electric Home Monitoring (EHM) for our youth on probation and pre-trial conditions. This tool will give our judges the discretion to keep youth in the community that may otherwise be ordered to detention. This will help keep our detention population at a sustainable level and further our efforts to use detention as a last option. We receive detention alternative funding from the state that may fund a portion of this project. If implemented, we will track outcomes related to kids that are placed on EHM, including re-offense or violation rates.

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

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?**

Our Staff Spanish Interpreter request represents a new way of doing business. Because of our current payment policies with our contracted interpreters, wasteful spending and can occur. Possessing a staff interpreter will give us a much greater control over billing and accounting for Spanish interpreter hours. More importantly, it also provides an immediate resource within our courthouse that can be deployed to a courtroom or other activity when an unexpected need for Spanish interpreting presents itself. It is worth mentioning that several other courts across the state are performing interpreting through the assistance of a staff interpreter which has proven to be effective in reducing unnecessary spending due to payment policies. This will provide better customer service and access to justice for our community.

- 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?**

This was partially addressed within the above-mentioned Strategic Goals section. Hiring is very difficult right now. We are also observing lower quality candidates that are applying in comparison to the strong hiring pools that we have seen in the past. Sometimes a recruitment process yields no viable candidates for hire. This has been our experience for approximately the last year. Inability to hire vacancies overburdens our existing staff, which in turn creates increased pressure and burnout and leads to decreased retention. Certain functions of our court operations may be delayed or deprioritized based on staff deficiency. We are continuing to discuss how to best mitigate these gaps in coverage. There is no perfect solution to any particular work unit and the solutions remain highly individualized, but salary adjustments must be considered as soon as possible.

- 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. 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.)**

Our Court doesn't provide services that are heavily dependent on goods or equipment, with the exception of our Courtroom A/V Project and our evidence-based programs that we deliver to youth in Juvenile Court. We have taken preemptive efforts and planned accordingly for these delays in order to reduce disruption, wherever possible.

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

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.

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

We do not have plans to perform a fee study. They are not established based on a full cost recovery model.

Successes

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

The addition of Judges #16 and #17 and Commissioner #6 have been extremely helpful in providing the correct amount of judicial support to handle our county's current caseload. Our Court is in a much better position to hear cases in a timely manner and avoid continuances due to judicial unavailability. This couldn't have been possible without the support and partnership of the County Council and County Executive's Office. We appreciate the County Council considering our budget requests earnestly.