

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?**

Since 2020 our office has been faced with constant change due to high turnover, significant changes in legislation, and major upgrades to State and locally implemented technology software. Consequently, our focus over the next few years is to stabilize and support staff to ensure they are properly trained and provided the tools needed to complete their mandated duties.

Despite the above challenges, the Clerk's Office is constantly evaluating and identifying ways to use technology to create efficiencies, decrease handling of paper records, and improve access to justice. As a result, the following projects are currently being implemented in the Clerk's Office.

- **Electronic Ex Parte via the Clerk**

The Electronic Ex Parte via the Clerk project is expected to go live mid-2025. This project was a collaboration between OPEX, IT and the Clerk using ARPA funds. The service will replace a manual paper-driven process with an electronic process that offers customers a more efficient method for payment, delivery, routing, and return of court documents for parties who are seeking court orders that do not require a court hearing.

- **Jury+ Web Generations**

The upgrade to the jury software was funded in the 2024 budget and it is expected to be complete prior to year's end. The upgrade will provide several additional features including the ability to communicate with jurors via text messaging and email, captures point-to-point mileage for reimbursements, juror payments via debit

card (removing the need for Finance to issue paper warrants) and has the ability to utilize an Express Check-In Kiosk for jurors.

- **Internal SharePoint Site**

Our administrative team is currently working with the County's IT department to build and organize a Clerk's SharePoint site that will provide a centralized and congruent environment for staff to access up-to-date documents, policies, and procedures in an intuitive manner. While this solution will provide tools for internal staff, our plan is to build upon the site to create hubs for communication and sharing of documents to external partners. Ultimately, this project will streamline and create significant efficiencies for the Clerk's office so that staff time and work can be maximized.

National, state and local landscape:

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

- a. Unfunded mandates. The legislature continues to implement extensive law changes that heavily affect our office with increased work and requires constant change management. This combined with staff shortages and 40% turnover rate, we have been limited in our ability to focus on tasks outside of our mandated duties. Although our vacancy rates are decreasing, we are currently in a period of continuous training and building a sustainable work force that can work independently and successfully.

The following unfunded mandates continue to have a significant impact on our office:

- HB 1320, SHB 1901, HB 1715, SB 5231. All of these bills are related to Protection Orders and No Contact Orders. Since 2020 we have seen a 112% increase in protection order petitions filed. To address the increase, in 2022 our office received an additional 1.0 FTE to support a 6th Commissioner who handles protection order hearings, however additional staffing is still needed to address the public's demands. As a result, the Clerk's Office Priority Package #450 requests to increase a .625 FTE to a 1.0 FTE.
- HB 1412, HB 1169 & ESSB 5974. All of these bills are related to criminal reform surrounding legal financial obligations in criminal and juvenile offender matters. In the 2023-24 Legislative Session, ESSB 5974 passed requiring all non-restitution juvenile LFOs be rendered null and void and any related judgments be considered satisfied in full by July 1, 2027. A tiered schedule was established to ensure cases filed within specific time frames

are addressed by July 1 of 2025 and 2026 respectfully. Our office has engaged in discussions with the involved law and justice partners to ensure we meet these deadlines ahead of schedule. This work combined with the work already in progress from previous implemented legislation as well as the work related to the Supreme Court decision in State v. Blake continues to stretch our resources and responsibilities.

- b. Increased Jury Summons Expenses. The number of jurors our office summonses increased significantly during COVID and continues to be above pre-COVID numbers, however the ARPA funds awarded to pay for those increased costs will end in 2024. Because of the continued demand and cost for summoning an increased number of jurors we are currently researching the cost/benefit in changing from a summons form that is stuffed into an envelope to a postcard that directs jurors to a website to receive jury duty information. Using a postcard summons will reduce costs for printing and postage, enabling us to stay within budget. Until this transition can occur, any expenses above our current allocated budget amounts will be absorbed through salary savings.
- c. Security Assessment. Across the country, courthouses have seen an increase in security breaches and violent incidents, highlighting the need to review and strengthen local security measures. Following the recent assessment conducted by the National Center for State Courts, several vulnerabilities were highlighted in the Clerk's Office security infrastructure (at Main Campus and at DJJC). As a result, the Clerk's Office has requested funding to address some of the recommendations, which are outlined in Priority Package #574. The factors outlined in the report underscore the need for enhancements to the security infrastructure within the courthouse buildings to protect staff, visitors, and the judicial process.

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.

- a. Please refer to Unfunded Mandates in previous question.
- b. Due to the decrease in Auditor fees collected from recorded documents, the Clerk was recently notified that grants from the Auditor's O&M Fund will not be awarded for the next two years. The loss of the grant funding will prohibit our ability to hire temporary employees to continue the work auditing the paper court records against the digital record before permanent destruction. Since beginning the audit and preservation project in 2021, our office has been able to audit and permanently destroy over 2,500 archive boxes of court records from the records center, 6,000+

offender and dependency files, and 1,200 search warrant cases. This is a multi-year project that will be paused until a grant funding source can be found to support continuing the work.

- c. With the implementation of technology, our office has faced continuous change due to mandatory and ongoing upgrades to State and locally implemented technology software and programs. These upgrades are outside of our direct control and although needed and necessary, they have had an impact on our staff, operations, and resources. Some examples of this are:
- Superior Court's Case Management System transitioning from Odyssey to Enterprise Justice. The case management system undergoes frequent updates to meet evolving judicial and legislative requirements. These upgrades, while essential for operational continuity, require additional investment in staff training, IT support, and system integration. And as the largest county using the state system, we are integral to ensuring any system upgrades are thoroughly tested prior to implementation.
 - Odyssey Portal, which provides remote public access to court records, will sunset the end of 2025 and a new application called ReSearch will replace it. This will require learning a new system, evaluating our current subscription structure, updating county code, additional training for staff and impacts our customers.
 - The implementation of the county's new timekeeping management application (TMSS) required a significant amount of training and continued administrative support and oversight, often disrupting payroll processing.
 - The 2023 Cayenta upgrade has significantly increased the time required to process AP batches in our division. Batches now take longer to prepare due to the extended time needed to attach supporting documentation. Additionally, the review process has become more complex, and attachments are not always visible to all reviewers. We understand that these challenges are affecting all departments, with an even greater impact on the Finance Department.

Programs

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

See Jury Summons Expenses under National, State and Local Landscape above.

- 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?**

The Clerk's Office is not requesting any new programs in 2025-2026.

- 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.**

No

Internal Operations

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

It is our understanding the Executive is now requesting a 1.5% targeted reduction which in our office equates to \$146,264 per year. We anticipate meeting this reduction primarily through salary savings. While we have begun to experience fewer vacancies and turnover compared to 2021-2022, we still have vacancies and expect to see normal turnover in the future. We will carefully monitor our expenditures and if necessary, delay posting vacant positions to help meet the target. We will also monitor all operational costs to help achieve the targeted budget reduction.

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

With the rapid advancements in technology, some increase in costs is expected. These developments often come with essential upgrades that enhance our services and ensure we stay ahead in providing innovative, efficient, secure, and reliable solutions.

As a department, we are committed to providing services while remaining fiscally responsible. We carefully monitor and audit all service-related expenses to ensure that costs are justified and align with our commitment to efficiency. As an example, the Clerk worked with AOC & Tyler Technologies to negotiate moving our e-filing services under the statewide e-filing contract between AOC & Tyler. As a result, the Clerk's e-filing contract with Tyler Technologies will end on September 30, 2024 and will save the County almost \$200,000 per year.

- 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 refer to provided spreadsheet.

- 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?**

Most of the Clerk's Office fees are mandated through RCW 36.18. Although, we believe a reasonable increase in fees is justified, the legislature has expressed it is not something they are willing to do as it creates additional barriers for those accessing the court system.