

Seattle Municipal Court

The Honorable Faye R. Chess, Presiding Judge

(206) 684-5600

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Department Overview

As the judicial branch of Seattle City government, the Seattle Municipal Court (SMC or Court) provides a forum to resolve alleged violations of the law in a respectful, independent, and impartial manner. SMC adjudicates misdemeanors, gross misdemeanors, infractions (e.g., traffic and parking tickets, traffic camera violations, and other violations), and civil violations related to building and zoning offenses. The Court has seven elected judges and five appointed magistrates. There are more cases processed here than any other municipal court in the State of Washington.

This is a transformational time at SMC with several change initiatives underway that will advance SMC as the people's court, providing fair, equitable and innovative delivery of justice. Each change initiative aligns with the Court's strategic priorities of:

- building capacity
- evolving services to center those served
- modeling a culture rooted in equity
- streamlining decision making
- engaging staff to develop future leaders today

In 2023, SMC continued realigning its organizational structure into four service areas: Operations, Administrative Services, Court Technology, and Strategy. This structure supports realizing SMC's strategic priorities by making the best use of court resources, eliminating siloed operations and functions, and ensuring court services are easy to navigate. The realignment improves transparency in decision-making and communication throughout the Court.

SMC recognizes undoing institutional racism and ensuring a culture of equity and inclusion requires engagement with community and staff to identify meaningful solutions. In 2023, SMC appointed its first Director of Equity and Engagement who is leading the development of the Court's diversity, equity, inclusion, and community engagement strategic plan and coordinates the Court's Race and Social Justice (RSJ) Change Team. SMC will continue to engage community through its judicial officers, as well as through *In The Community* outreach events. These events bring court services and resources to Seattle neighborhoods and are an opportunity for community members to receive assistance with resolving SMC warrants, learn about options for addressing tickets, help with reinstating their driver's license, and access supportive services through the Community Resource Center.

The Court continues its multi-year project to replace its 30+ year-old legacy municipal court information system, MCIS, with a modern and adaptable case management solution. The new system will streamline court processes, provide a better court user experience, improve the accessibility of court services, make it easier for partners to work collaboratively with the Court, and generate analytics in support of understanding the impact of the broader criminal legal system. User stories and human-centered design inform the business transformation. The project is on track to go-live in early 2024.

Mid-2023, SMC wrapped up its three-year Probation Evolution project, an effort focused on improving client outcomes and minimizing disproportionate impacts probation has on women and people of color. The Court utilized the City's RSJ toolkit and community engagement to guide the changes considered and adopted in this project. Program changes made through this project include more equitable reporting guidelines and noncompliance policy, client-focused case planning and quarterly progress reports designed to highlight client successes and personal goals, and published dashboards on Court website to increase transparency.

Ensuring access to justice for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind (D/HH/DV) individuals remains a priority for the Court. SMC has provided Interpreter Services in 149 languages since 2005,

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including American Sign Language. Free interpreter services are provided for criminal and civil matters, including court hearings, trials, attorney-client interviews, probation appointments, prosecution witnesses, mental health evaluations, customer service, and translation of court forms and letters.

SMC looks forward to the strategic changes planned for the next year that will advance the court values of service, fairness, equity and inclusion, innovation, excellence, and integrity.

Budget Snapshot

	2022 Actuals	2023 Adopted	2024 Endorsed	2024 Proposed
Department Support				
General Fund Support	39,955,913	40,915,616	42,579,344	43,461,894
Total Operations	39,955,913	40,915,616	42,579,344	43,461,894
Total Appropriations	39,955,913	40,915,616	42,579,344	43,461,894
Full-Time Equivalents Total*	206.35	201.85	201.85	201.85

** FTE totals are provided for informational purposes only. Changes in FTEs resulting from City Council or Human Resources Director actions outside of the budget process may not be detailed here*

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Incremental Budget Changes

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	2024 Budget	FTE
Total 2024 Endorsed Budget	42,579,344	201.85
Baseline		
Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	882,550	-
Proposed Technical		
Net-Zero Position Moves	-	-
Ongoing Changes from Current Year Legislation	-	-
Total Incremental Changes	\$882,550	-
Total 2024 Proposed Budget	\$43,461,894	201.85

Description of Incremental Budget Changes

Baseline

Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes

Expenditures \$882,550

Citywide technical adjustments made in the baseline phase reflect changes to internal services costs, including rates from the Department of Finance & Administrative Services, Seattle Information Technology Department, Seattle Department of Human Resources, and for healthcare, retirement, and industrial insurance charges for the department. These adjustments reflect initial assumptions about these costs and inflators early in the budget process.

Proposed Technical

Net-Zero Position Moves

Expenditures -

Position Allocation -

This net-zero technical change moves three positions and salary between Budget Control Levels. This aligns staff to the current reporting structure in the Administration and Court Operations BSLs.

Ongoing Changes from Current Year Legislation

Position Allocation -

This change includes ongoing budget and/or position changes resulting from current year legislation in 2023, including the Q3 Supplemental Ordinance.

The Court is providing key resources for the MCIS 2.0 Replacement Project from existing staff. This item extends four positions due to sunset at the end of 2023 through “go-live” and user testing in key project areas which is

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anticipated to be through the end of 2024. Project areas include Court Technology, Court Operations and Finance. These positions are funded by the MCIS 2.0 bond project.

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2023-24 Proposed Mid-Biennial Budget Adjustments - Expenses

Budget Summary Level	Fund	Budget Process Phase Endorsed	Proposed Changes	Grand Total
Administration	00100 - General Fund	19,761,722	966,863	20,728,586
Administration Total		19,761,722	966,863	20,728,586
Court Compliance	00100 - General Fund	5,088,378	-152,989	4,935,389
Court Compliance Total		5,088,378	-152,989	4,935,389
Court Operations	00100 - General Fund	17,729,244	68,676	17,797,920
Court Operations Total		17,729,244	68,676	17,797,920
Grand Total		42,579,344	882,550	43,461,894