



WASHINGTON
COURTS

District and Municipal Court Judges' Association

January 4, 2024

President

JUDGE JEFFREY R. SMITH
Spokane County District Court
1100 W Mallon Ave
PO Box 2352
Spokane, WA 99210-2352
(509) 477-2959

President-Elect

JUDGE KARL WILLIAMS
Pierce County District Court
930 Tacoma Ave S Rm 239
Tacoma, WA 98402-2115
(253) 798-3312

Vice-President

JUDGE ANITA M. CRAWFORD-WILLIS
Seattle Municipal Court
600 5th Ave
PO Box 34987
Seattle, WA 98124-4987
(206) 684-8709

Secretary/Treasurer

JUDGE JEFFREY D. GOODWIN
Snohomish County District Court
20520 68th Ave W
Lynnwood, WA 98036-7406
(425) 744-6800

Past President

JUDGE RICK LEO
Snohomish County District Court
14414 179th Ave SE
Monroe, WA 98272-0625
(360) 805-6776

Board of Governors

COMMISSIONER PATRICK EASON
Skagit County District Court
(360) 416-1250

JUDGE MICHAEL R. FRANS
Kent Municipal Court
(253) 856-5730

JUDGE MICHELLE K. GEHLSSEN
King County District Court
(206) 688-0418

JUDGE ANGELLE GERL
Airway Heights Municipal Court
(509) 244-2773

JUDGE JESSICA GINER
Renton Municipal Court
(425) 430-6565

JUDGE CAROLYN M. JEWETT
San Juan County District Court
(360) 378-4017

JUDGE CATHERINE MCDOWALL
Seattle Municipal Court
(206) 684-5600

JUDGE LLOYD D. OAKS
Pierce County District Court
(253) 798-7487

JUDGE WHITNEY RIVERA
Edmonds Municipal Court
(425) 771-0210

Honorable Steven C. González
Washington State Supreme Court
Temple of Justice
P.O. Box 40929
Olympia, WA 98504-0929

Sarah Bannister
Secretary of the Senate
Washington State Senate
PO Box 40482
Olympia, WA 98504-0482

Honorable Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Bernard Dean
Chief Clerk of the House
House of Representatives
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

RE: 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Chief Justice González, Governor Inslee, Ms. Bannister and Mr. Dean:

On behalf of the District and Municipal Court Judges' Association (DMCJA), I submit this annual report on the condition of business in the courts of limited jurisdiction (CLJs) to the Washington State Supreme Court, Governor, and Legislature, pursuant to Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 3.70.040(3).

Historically, district and municipal courts process about eighty-seven percent of Washington State's judicial caseload. In 2023, courts continued to recover from the impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency, including ongoing efforts to administer justice through remote proceedings. From January 2023 to October 2023, CLJs handled one million, two hundred eighty-five thousand, and seventy-three (1,285,073) cases, an increase of nearly 8% from the prior year. *See Administrative Office of the Courts' Caseload Report for January 2023 to October 2023.* The revenue collected from CLJs during this period was one hundred thirty-four million, six hundred eighty-three thousand, two hundred sixty dollars (\$134,683,260), according to the caseload report.

This year, the DMCJA has performed its duties¹ as follows:

Identifying and Eliminating Systemic Racism in our Justice System

Since 2020, the DMCJA has had as its number one priority, Identifying and Eliminating Systemic Racism in our Justice System. A fair justice system relies on the public's trust and confidence in order to function properly. Therefore, district and municipal courts will work to eradicate racial injustice within the justice system, cognizant that courts of limited jurisdiction are the courts with which the most people interact. Although unsuccessful in its legislative funding request for a project to study bias in district and municipal courts, the DMCJA

new therapeutic court programs in 28 jurisdictions, bringing the total number of therapeutic programs in CLJs to approximately 76, across 50 jurisdictions. A recent survey of CLJ therapeutic programs showed the total number of individuals participating in these programs has grown to approximately 3,880, with 590 program completions (or “graduations”) in 2023 alone.

The DMCJA continues to seek innovative ways to address the needs of court users with mental health and drug-related issues, particularly in regard to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on therapeutic court programs, along with the *State v. Blake* decision.

Educate Justice Partners

To accomplish the goals of the DMCJA, we must educate and collaborate with the executive and legislative branches of local and state government. The DMCJA Public Outreach Committee is tasked with developing materials that will assist urban and rural court judges in educating local government and the public, including reference materials, planning events, and providing information on local programs, funding opportunities, and community partnerships. For the last two years, the Public Outreach Committee has held successful events (known as the “You’ve Been Served” event) in courthouses across the state to introduce judicial officers to both state and local officials, and to assist those officials with understanding the issues facing the judicial branch.

Preserving the Independence of Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

Maintaining independence as the third branch of government can be challenging at the CLJ level due to the legislative and executive branches of government controlling the funding of local courts. Occasionally, in the funding process, the other branches of government attempt to exert undue control over the judicial and personnel decisions of the courts. Judges should not be penalized or in jeopardy of losing their positions based on the exercise of judicial independence. Hence, in 2023, the DMCJA Council on Independent Courts (CIC) continues to meet regularly to fulfill its charge to protect, promote, and maintain the respect and dignity of courts of limited jurisdiction as a co-equal branch of local government.

Legal Financial Obligations: Education and Outreach

The DMCJA recognizes the impact of court imposed financial obligations on indigent individuals, and encourages its members to utilize innovative methods to address these disparate impacts. Electronic home monitoring, alcohol monitoring, and abusive partner intervention programs are examples of pretrial and post-conviction services that indigent defendants are often required to pay for without assistance, and the DMCJA has prioritized researching and educating members on best practices and potential funding sources so that each judicial officer can better address the court’s responsibility to indigent defendants in the imposition and collection of financial obligations ordered by the court.

Member Engagement

The DMCJA fulfills its statutory obligations primarily through its committees and participation in the workgroups created by other bodies. In 2022, the legislature provided funding to AOC to hire two Senior Court Program Analysts to work with the DMCJA, staff its committees, and provide research, project management and legislative analysis on behalf of the association. Those positions were filled in late 2022, and the DMCJA has found the impact of having additional staff to be significant. In addition to reviewing legislative proposals, staffing committees, and writing reports, the analysts have been able to significantly change how DMCJA is able to respond to inquiries from legislators, other agencies, and DMCJA’s own membership.