

# COURT UPDATE

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## PIERCE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

A WELCOME FROM PRESIDING JUDGE  
MARTIN, A PREVIEW OF 2018'S STRATEGIC  
PRIORITIES, AND A REVIEW OF 2017  
STATISTICS.



## Message from 2017/2018 Presiding Judge Elizabeth Martin

I have now completed my first year of a two-year term as Presiding Judge of the Pierce County Superior Court. It has been and continues to be a distinct privilege to serve in this capacity. We truly have a wonderful bench of dedicated judicial officers and fabulous support staff. I want to publicly acknowledge and thank our court administrative team and our judges and commissioners.

2017 was a year of transition. The close of 2016 brought the retirements of Judge Vicki Hogan, Judge Ron Culpepper and Judge Katherine Stolz. In March, we also celebrated the well-earned retirement of Commissioner Mary Dicke. Collectively, along with Judge Brian Tollefson who retired in May 2016, we lost over 100 years of judicial experience, wisdom and institutional knowledge. As difficult as it was to absorb that loss, we also welcomed with joy four new judges and three new commissioners: Judge Grant Blinn, Judge Karena Kirkendoll, Judge Shelly Speir, Judge Timothy Ashcraft, Commissioner Barbara McInville, Commissioner Sabrina Ahrens and Commissioner Terri Farmer. Our newest judicial officers have enriched us with their energy, talent, creativity, passion and enthusiasm.

We are particularly grateful to have welcomed a newly added ninth commissioner position and extend our gratitude to the Executive and to the County Council for supporting this additional critical resource. The addition of the ninth commissioner has made it possible for us to expand our services for individuals seeking Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPO).

As part of our ongoing focus on domestic violence issues, we have hosted regular meetings of an ad hoc DV task force to evaluate our utilization of kiosk filing for DVPO petitions, develop protocols for the surrender of firearms and ensure compliance with firearm surrender orders issued in the civil DV arena.

Another strategic priority for 2017 was our continued study of mental health issues within our court systems and challenges within our community. We have partnered with community, health and governmental leaders in developing programs aimed at reducing or diverting persons with mental health issues from the criminal justice system. We have and will continue to advocate for adequate judicial resources to address mental health issues.

The opioid epidemic and substance abuse within our community continues to challenge us as well. Our Felony Drug Court and Family Recovery Court, now well into their third decade, continue to make a difference one life at a time while addressing the particular challenges of heroin and methamphetamine addiction. The opioid epidemic has also had an impact on our dependency cases at Juvenile Court. Pierce County has the highest number of dependency cases in the State of Washington. Going forward, we will continue our partnership with community and governmental leaders to address the opiate crisis while advocating for additional judicial resources to meet this challenge.

Our court's commitment to the timely and efficient resolution of criminal cases remained a top priority in 2017. By the end of 2017, the number of pending criminal cases had dropped by nearly 300 cases and we showed an increase of over 150 in the total of criminal cases resolved. We also achieved a reduction in our inventory of older cases.

As the Pierce County Superior Court Presiding Judge, I am here to listen and respond to concerns from those we serve and from our stakeholders on how we can improve our delivery of services. Each and every one of us shares in our mission, which is to provide for the fair, prompt and efficient resolution of disputes and to provide due process in each case that comes before us.

Presiding Judge Elizabeth P. Martin

# 2018 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



## 1 ENHANCING THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

- Streamline procedures in Ex Parte Courtroom.
- Conduct an All-Staff Meeting within Superior Court in conjunction with the Active Shooter training.
- Work with Facilities to determine best utilization of CCB facilities in the performance of Superior Court operations.
- Study the allocation of judicial resources to affirm best utilization/needs and implement changes as appropriate.
- Seek funding for additional judicial resources.
- Continue to seek stable funding for Therapeutic Courts.
- Implement reorganization of the Court's response to Domestic Violence Protection Orders.
- Continued collaboration with District Court on felony to misdemeanor diversion programs.

## 2 BROADENING ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

- Expand the translated documents provided by the Court and encourage use.
- Family Court Services Spanish language forms.
- Support and encourage jury service.
- Review parking, comfort and pay obstacles related to jury service.
- Expand available videos on Court website of Court processes, to include alternate languages.
- Increase options to assist Pro-Se litigants navigating the dissolution process.
- Begin Pro Se screening in Commissioner Services.

## 3 PROMOTING COMPETENCE, PROFESSIONALISM AND CIVILITY

- Final review of the Superior Court Personnel Manual updates.
- Conduct specialized training for Administration Supervisors.
- Review of leave policies for Judicial Staff and Judges.
- Formalize any approved changes to the role of Managing Court Reporter.
- Continue judicial education and training on issues of implicit and unconscious bias.

## 4 JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE: ENSURING IMPARTIALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Produce a report which can be distributed to the public about court processes and performance.
- Review of court performance reports to determine if there are better/different reports we should be creating.
- Investigate a method to determine the Court's effectiveness.
- Conduct a training for Judicial Officers and staff on records retention.

## 5 IMPROVING COURT FACILITIES

- Create Technology Go-Kits which allow Superior Court personnel to complete mission critical functions away from our primary location.
- Bring PCSC COOP plan in line with Pierce County OEM standards.
- Determine an alternative site to hold Western State Hospital mental health hearings during a catastrophic event.
- Investigate Juvenile Court facility upgrades or possibly co-locating Juvenile Court with the County-City Building.

## 6 EFFECTIVELY UTILIZING TECHNOLOGY

- Update to the latest tablet version for Administration Management and Judicial Officers to take advantage of technological advances.
- Investigate a better phone system in Jury administration, which would make it easier for jurors to respond to jury summons.
- Investigate Jury Administration installing digital signs or screens in hall, jury room and lobby displaying the status of a group or if they are lining up.
- Investigate and support expansion of ECO for other courtrooms/dockets.
- Investigate text reminder system for criminal review hearings.

## 7 BUILDING TRUST AND CONFIDENCE THROUGH COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- Complete Phase 2 of the Court History Project.
- Attend a community event with Administration employees to encourage employment and jury service.
- Attend local Legal classes with Administration employees to encourage a diverse hiring pool.
- Continue to engage in community service and educational projects and promote those events via media.



**Strategic planning ensures the Court is purposeful in adapting to changes in the law, the needs of its constituents, and providing appropriate resources to ensure the timely resolution of disputes.**

*Judge Stephanie Arend*

# CRIMINAL

FILINGS ↓ 5%

RESOLUTIONS ↑ 7%

PROCEEDINGS ↓ 4%

TRIALS ↓ 7%

PENDING CASES ↓ 10%  
DOWN FROM A HIGH OF 1715 TO 1417

CONTINUANCES ↓ 51%

# CIVIL

FILINGS ↑ 2%

RESOLUTIONS ↑ 2%

PROCEEDINGS ↑ 3%

TRIALS ↑ 26%

DOMESTIC RESOLUTION RATE ↑ 102%

CIVIL RESOLUTION RATE ↑ 100%

# FAMILY

PENDING CASES 717

CASES ADDED 1412

CASES RESOLVED 1404

STATUS CONF. 275

35 NEW CASES ASSIGNED TO STAFF GAL'S, ASSISTING 60 CHILDREN

90% OF FAMILY CASES RESOLVED W/IN 1 YEAR

FLCT ASSISTED ON 600 CASES WITH 177 RESOLVED

# THERAPEUTIC

## DRUG COURT

SCREENINGS 896

ADMITS 198

GRADUATES 89

## MENTAL HEALTH

SCREENINGS 143

ADMITS 30

GRADUATES 18

# OUR COURT

2 0 1 7

↑ OR ↓ AS COMPARED TO 2016



# JUVENILE

ADOPTION  10%

CIVIL HEARD 26,373

CRIM. PROCEED.  6%

PENDING CRIM. 213

CRIM. HEARD 10,859

DEPENDENCY PETITIONS FILED 785

# COMMISSIONER

EX PARTE  15%

EX PARTE MAIL  28%

SHOW CAUSE  8%

WSH HEARINGS 3,631

DV CASES HEARD 3,898

DVPO PETITIONS 4,041

FIREARMS ORDERS 816

# INTERPRETER

SPANISH 3,205

OTHER 1,697

BUDGET \$332,572

# OF LANGUAGES INTERPRETED 60

# JURY

JUROR DAYS  10%

29,517  
# OF DAYS JURORS ASSIGNED TO A PANEL

BURN RATE  20%

COSTS  20%

SUMMONED 98,490

COMPLETED 15,134

SEATED 2,981





Front Row L to R: Judge Bryan Chushcoff, Judge Kitty-Ann van Doorninck, Judge Stephanie Arend, Judge Jim Orlando, Judge Kathryn Nelson, Judge Frank Cuthbertson, Judge John Hickman; Middle Row L to R: Judge Susan Serko, Judge Ed Murphy, Judge Elizabeth Martin, Judge Gary Johnson, Judge Stan Rumbaugh, Judge Jerry Costello, Judge Jack Nevin, Judge Phil Sorensen; Back Row L to R: Judge Gretchen Leanderson, Judge G. Helen Whitener, Judge Michael Schwartz, Judge Grant Blinn, Judge Karen Kirekendoll, Judge Shelly Speir, Judge Tim Ashcraft.

## ABOUT SUPERIOR COURT

Pierce County Superior Court is the second largest Superior Court in the State of Washington and is proud to serve the citizens and visitors of Pierce County. The Court is staffed with 22 Judges and 9 Commissioners. There are three sites where court is held; the County City Building at 930 Tacoma Ave S Tacoma, Remann Hall Juvenile Court at 5501 6th Ave Tacoma, and Western State Hospital at 9601 Steilacoom Blvd SW, Lakewood.

PIERCE COUNTY  
**SUPERIOR COURT**

 [www.piercecountywa.gov/superiorcourt](http://www.piercecountywa.gov/superiorcourt)

 (253) 798-3654

 (253) 798-7214

 [pcsupcrt@piercecountywa.gov](mailto:pcsupcrt@piercecountywa.gov)