



WASHINGTON
COURTS

District and Municipal Court Judges' Association

President

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

President-Elect

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

Vice-President

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

Secretary/Treasurer

JUDGE JESSICA GINER
Renton Municipal Court
1055 S Grady Way
Renton, WA 98057-3232
(425) 430-6565

Past President

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

Board of Governors

JUDGE ERIC C. BIGGAR
Douglas County District Court
(509) 884-3536

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

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

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

JUDGE ANTHONY GIPE
Kent Municipal Court
(253) 856-5730

JUDGE WILLIE GREGORY
Seattle Municipal Court
(206) 684-8711

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

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

JUDGE MINDY L. WALKER
Jefferson County District Court
(360) 385-9135

December 31, 2024

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: 2024 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. From January 2024 to October 2024, CLJs handled one million, three hundred eighty-nine thousand, six hundred and fifty-nine (1,389,659) cases, an increase of over 8% from the prior year and a 20% increase since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. *See Administrative Office of the Courts' Caseload Report for January 2024 to October 2024.* The revenue collected from CLJs during this period was one hundred forty-one million, nine hundred and three thousand, one hundred forty-six dollars (\$141,903,146), according to the caseload report.

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

Identifying and Eliminating Systemic Racism in our Justice System

Since 2020, the DMCJA has had as its number one priority, Identify and Eliminate Systemic Racism in our Justice System. A fair justice system relies on the public's trust and confidence to function properly. Therefore, district and municipal courts must work to eradicate racial injustice within the justice system, cognizant that courts of limited jurisdiction are the courts with which most people interact.

In furtherance of this goal, the DMCJA applied for and was awarded \$150,000 in grant funding through the JAG Innovation Fund to implement a pilot project to study bias in district and municipal courts over the course of the next year, and our Diversity Committee is partnering with the Washington State Bar Association to hold a training

for judges pro tempore with a focus on minority bar association members as attendees. The DMCJA Board of Governors also receives training on, and discusses in-depth, racial equity issues at each of its monthly meetings.

Courthouse Security

The safety of all who work within and of those who visit our courthouses remains a top priority for the DMCJA. Recent courthouse security incidents both throughout the state and nationally have highlighted the need for adequate equipment and personnel to maintain safety for members of the public, courthouse staff, and judicial officers, yet many of our district and municipal courts still lack the most basic security measures. General Rule (GR) 36, *Trial Court Security*, provides recommended minimum security standards for trial courts, yet many local courts lack resources for complying with the standards. In an effort to support trial courts, DMCJA leaders have educated judges, court staff, and funding bodies of GR 36 requirements. The DMCJA strongly holds that the public and all court staff have an inherent right to expect a safe environment while in court, and as such, the DMCJA continues to gather reports of security incidents and to educate both state and local legislative and executive branch leaders on the need to collaborate to find solutions for this important issue.

Access to Justice

Access to justice is critical to the citizens of Washington State. Access may include, but is not limited to: quality interpreter services, courtroom and court staff accessibility, technological related access, and the facilitation of services for self-represented litigants. The DMCJA has supported the efforts of the Board for Judicial Administration (BJA) to address access to justice issues. In our digitized world, members of the public should have the option of using technology to access the courts. The DMCJA continues to encourage courts to employ technology such as Zoom or other platforms to improve accessibility and attendance at proceedings and are active participants in the BJA Remote Proceedings workgroup. In addition, the DMCJA encourages the development and use of community resource centers in or near our courts, which enable court participants to access service providers.

In 2025, the DMCJA intends to expand its collaboration with the Administrative Office of the Courts, specifically the Washington State Center for Court Research, to bring forth better access to justice and ensure that research results in actionable efforts to address the needs in our communities.

Judicial Work-Life Balance and Wellness

Inherent with the duties of a judicial officer are the stress and vicarious trauma that accompany the day-to-day tasks of adjudicating issues before the court. In addition, the workload of many judicial officers is daunting and overwhelming at times. Never-ending commitments are placed on judicial officers, where many are required to be available nearly constantly, and decision fatigue is common. It is also apparent that mental health and physical well-being are critical components to judicial officers' perspectives and decision-making ability. The DMCJA recognizes the importance of mental and physical health in judicial officers and considers work-life balance and wellness a priority. The DMCJA strives to equip judicial officers with tools to effectively make judicial wellness a reality, including encouraging participation in educational programs on the subject of wellbeing, and active support of the Judicial Assistance Services Program (JASP).

Sustainability of Therapeutic Courts

Addressing the pressing issues of mental health and drug addiction in Washington communities is a priority for the DMCJA. The DMCJA Therapeutic Courts Committee, in collaboration with the Administrative Office of the Courts Behavioral Health team, provides best-practice training and information, along with a myriad of resources for new and long-standing therapeutic courts and their judicial officers. Funding provided by the legislature over the last few years has led to the creation of 22 new therapeutic court programs in 28 jurisdictions, bringing the total number of therapeutic programs in CLJs to approximately 76, across 50 jurisdictions.

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. Our Therapeutic Courts Committee provides mentorship and resources for newly formed therapeutic court judicial officers and holds monthly discussion groups to address issues as they arise.

Educating 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 three years, the Public Outreach Committee has held successful events (known as the “You’ve Been Served: A Courthouse Dialogue” 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 2024, 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.

Continuity of Operations

Access to justice exists only when courts are operational, and each court, regardless of size and location, must plan for continuity of operations in response to a spectrum of contingencies including pandemic, personnel, technology, or logistical distributions or threats. In November 2024, the Administrative Office of the Courts experienced a statewide outage of its systems, resulting in a complete or partial shutdown of operations for many courts. The DMCJA is working with the AOC and individual district and municipal courts to ensure that all court leaders have the education and ability to identify resources to help their courts prepare robust plans to help them continue operations through potential threats and disruptions.

Leadership

Many new judges have little to no prior leadership and/or management experience. A Presiding Judge’s responsibilities are numerous and may prove overwhelming for an untrained court leader. Courts struggling with a leadership crisis may experience high personnel turnover, strained resources, poor judicial ratings, or worse. Municipal courts risk elimination if their judge fails to effectively lead their team members, if they struggle to establish a viable working relationship with their court manager, or do not properly

manage/supervise resources. The DMCJA is committed to the success, health, and welfare of all CLJs and their employees and will strive to assist judicial officers with leadership and management training.

The CLJ Judicial Onboarding Program, established in 2024 with two experienced retired judges as Onboarding Jurists-in-Residence, provides new judicial officers with a program they can easily access to receive coaching, mentorship, and access to resources. The new DMCJA Leadership Committee, approved by the Board of Governors in December, will provide additional leadership education opportunities for new and experienced judicial officers, manage oversight of the Judicial Onboarding Program, and develop cohorts for members to meet with their peers to discuss concerns or issues of shared interest.

Legislation

The DMCJA plans to take the following action during the 2025 Legislative Session:

1. Support funding requests from the Administrative Office of the Courts for additional judicial education funding, including continuing funds for the CLJ Judicial Onboarding Program.
2. Request the introduction of legislation that will establish a legislative work group to review laws related to criminal insanity and competency to stand trial ([Chapter 10.77 RCW](#)).
3. Request the introduction of legislation that will correct a technical error to notices in small claims actions ([HB 1007](#)).

Members of the DMCJA will participate in the legislative process by speaking with legislators about district and municipal court-related bills and budget requests, and we will visit the Legislature at DMCJA Legislative Day on February 5, 2025.

Thank you for the opportunity to report on the business of the DMCJA. On behalf of the DMCJA Board of Governors and officers, I thank the Washington State Supreme Court, the Board for Judicial Administration, and the Washington State Legislature for their continued support of all district and municipal courts.

Sincerely,



Judge Karl Williams
DMCJA President

cc: Justice Debra Stephens, Chief Justice-elect
Bob Ferguson, Governor-elect

¹ RCW 3.70.040 prescribes the DMCJA's duties as: "The Washington state district and municipal court judges' association shall: (1) Continuously survey and study the operation of the courts served by its membership, the volume and condition of business of such courts, the methods of procedure therein, the work accomplished, and the character of the results; (2) Promulgate suggested rules for the administration of the courts of limited jurisdiction not inconsistent with the law or rules of the supreme court relating to such courts; (3) Report annually to the supreme court as well as the governor and the legislature on the condition of business in the courts of limited jurisdiction, including the association's recommendations as to needed changes in the organization, operation, judicial procedure, and laws or statutes implemented or enforced in these courts."