

# PREAMBLE

*We, the people of the State of Washington, grateful to the Supreme Ruler  
of the Universe for our liberties, do ordain this constitution.*

Report  
of the Courts  
of Washington  
2003-2004



# *Letter From Washington*

## *Supreme Court Chief Justice*

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“This report offers a glimpse into the major issues and achievements of the judicial branch of government in the past year.”

On behalf of our state’s judiciary, it is my pleasure to present the Report of the Courts of Washington.

As this year’s report demonstrates, Washington’s courts are undergoing monumental changes. From advances made in trial court coordination to the completion of an historic study documenting the need for reforming the way we fund our trial courts, public defense and civil legal aid services for the indigent, our courts continue to evolve and modernize in the quest to better provide equal justice for all.

This report offers a glimpse into the major issues and achievements of the judicial branch of government in the past year. Comprehensive caseload information on the work of the courts is also available online at [www.courts.wa.gov](http://www.courts.wa.gov).

While we face many challenges, I am proud to serve with the more than 400 judges throughout our great state. I thank all of these women and men and their dedicated staffs who work hard each day to improve the public’s level of trust and confidence in our state’s court system.

*Gerry Alexander*



# Justice In Jeopardy:

“  
Injustice anywhere  
is a threat to  
justice everywhere.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

April 16, 1963

## The Court Funding Crisis In Washington State

No phrase represents the impact of the funding crisis facing our trial courts better than these words of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

Chronic underfunding of our judicial branch has led to a crisis in trial court operations. Currently, a patchwork system of justice from one county to the next has caused serious disparities in the way laws are being enforced throughout Washington State.

-Washington's trial courts, consisting of more than 400 judges, adjudicate more than 2.3 million cases each year. The fate of millions of lives is decided by trial court rulings on criminal, civil, and family law cases. For a branch of government that directly impacts the lives of citizens everyday, funding of our equal but separate branch of government is shockingly low.



According to a statewide fatality review panel in 2000, the death of 3-year-old Zy'Nyia Nobles could have been prevented, in part, if a courtroom had been available to hear a scheduled parental termination proceeding in Pierce County Superior Court. Due to additional court continuances and changes of social workers, new social workers assigned to the case chose to reunite the girl with her mother rather than go to trial. Less than one year later, Zy'Nia was kicked to death by her mother, who was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

**Washington State ranks at the absolute bottom in the nation for state funding of our trial courts, prosecution, and indigent defense.** With less than three-tenths of one percent of the State's budget going towards funding our judicial branch of government, it is without question that the lack of funding for Washington's trial courts critically impacts the judicial branch's ability to provide equal justice for all.

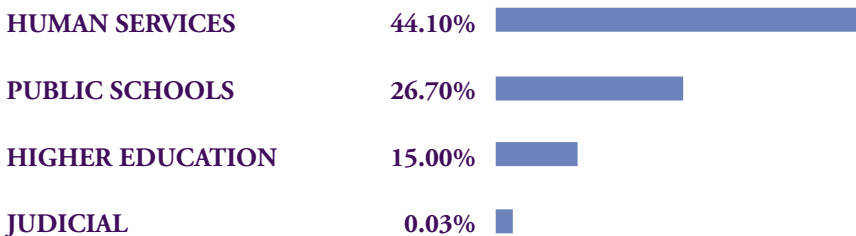
To address these issues the policy-setting body for the judicial branch of government, the Board for Judicial Administration, has embarked on a historic effort to reform court funding.

With a goal of developing a long-term strategy to reverse the court funding crisis, the Court Funding Task Force (chaired by former State Bar Association President M. Wayne Blair) included five workgroups totaling more than 100 members who labored throughout two years to define the funding problems, explore alternatives, and to create strategies for achieving change.

As part of their work, Task Force members and staff completed a comprehensive study on trial court funding and expenses, and gave their first presentation to state lawmakers in December of 2003.

## A SNAPSHOT OF THE WASHINGTON STATE BUDGET

State funding of the judicial branch totals three tenths of one percent of the state budget.



## FINDINGS OF THE TASK FORCE INCLUDE:

“If we deny basic funding for the courts, we endanger public safety and fail to provide a neutral forum for people to resolve disputes,”

—American Bar Association President  
Dennis Archer

- Washington ranks 50th among U.S. states in the percentage of trial court, prosecution, and indigent defense costs paid by the state versus costs paid by local jurisdictions, according to the U.S. Justice Bureau. For instance, Connecticut’s state government pays 92.2 percent of the state’s trial court costs and judicial service costs (highest in the U.S.), while Washington’s state government pays 14.7 percent (lowest in the U.S.).
- A study of Washington State trial court costs for 2000, including expenses for indigent defense and other operating costs, showed expenditures of \$428.5 million.
- State contributions toward trial court expenditures in 2000 totaled \$45.5 million.
- Trial court fees and court fines totaled about \$176 million in 2002 — \$66 million (37.5 percent) went to the state, and \$110 million went to local governments.
- In 2002, the Washington State Patrol was responsible for 88 percent of DUI (driving under the influence) charges and 70 percent of traffic infraction charges filed in district courts.
- The state pays nothing toward the cost of district and municipal courts or trial court indigent defense.
- The result of such a heavy dependence on city and county budgets is instability in court funding, as well as a potentially significant unevenness in judicial services from county to county and city to city. For example, some courts may operate without probation departments, bailiffs, and domestic violence services.

“Washington court funding is not adequate, is not stable, and is seriously uneven across the state from jurisdiction to jurisdiction,” Chief Justice Gerry Alexander told House Judiciary Committee members. “It substantially interferes with our trial courts’ ability to perform their core functions at all levels.”

Early examples included King County closing two district court locations, eliminating 70 positions, and consideration of cutting the entire district court probation department in response to

budget cuts. A survey showed that 43 percent of the state’s district and municipal courts have no probation services to perform pre-sentence investigations or to monitor potentially dangerous defendants. Courts across the state considered closing for certain hours or days of the week to save money.

Following two years of work, the Court Funding Task Force determined that adequate funding of the state’s trial courts would cost an additional \$204 million per year.

## MISSION:

Develop and implement a plan to achieve adequate, stable and long-term funding of Washington’s trial courts to provide equal justice throughout the state.

## STEP ONE:

After establishing the amount of unmet need and finalizing their report in late 2004, the state’s Board for Judicial Administration developed the following recommendations for immediate change to three crucial areas of trial court operations, indigent defense, and civil legal aid.

## TRIAL COURT FUNDING

- The state should assume 50 percent of the cost of jury fees and mileage costs. Also, the Jury Commission recommendation of \$10 for the first day and higher reimbursement for subsequent days of jury duty should be adopted.
- The state should assume 50 percent of the cost of district court judges’ salaries.
- The state should assume 50 percent of the cost of elected municipal court judges’ salaries.
- A “Trial Court Improvement Account” should be established in each jurisdiction with 50 percent of the savings realized from the state assuming half of judicial salaries and jury fees.
- Superior court filing fees should be increased by \$90, district court filing fees should be increased by \$24, and miscellaneous fees should be increased.

## INDIGENT DEFENSE

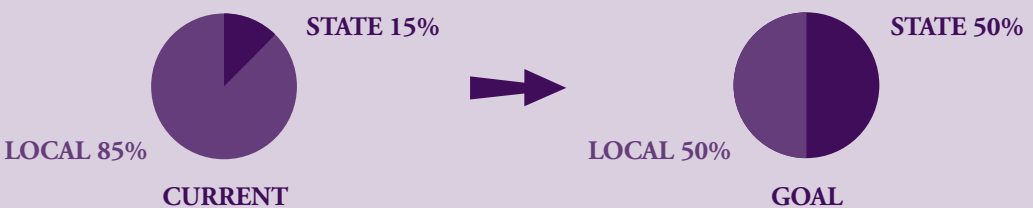
- The state should pay 100 percent of the cost of representing parents in dependency actions to be phased in over the biennium.
- An extended training program should be created for new public defense attorneys.
- New staff positions should be created within the Office of Public Defense to provide technical support to jurisdictions regarding public defense contracts and services.
- Senior lawyer positions should be created to provide expertise and assistance to public defenders.
- The state should provide direct fiscal support to local jurisdictions for increased indigent defense services, and to stave off impending service cuts.

## CIVIL LEGAL AID

- The state should make a significant and meaningful increase in civil legal aid funding and shift the administration and oversight of civil legal aid funding to the judicial branch in an Office of Civil Legal Aid.
- The capacity of the Northwest Justice Project (NJP) to respond to the critical legal needs of seniors, domestic violence victims, developmentally disabled and other low-income people should be expanded. NJP’s CLEAR hotline should also be expanded.
- The Alliance for Equal Justice should leverage additional volunteer attorney contributions.

## ULTIMATE GOAL:

The state should share more equitably in funding trial courts and indigent defense – by contributing roughly 50 percent – to stabilize court funding and provide equality across the state.







In our civil justice system, an overwhelming majority of low-income households go without any legal assistance in matters impacting basic human needs such as housing, family safety, health and employment. According to a recent study, more than 85 percent of low-income individuals who experience a civil legal problem do not get any assistance whatsoever and end up living with the consequences of their problem.

That unmet need is broken into three critical areas where inadequate funding is significantly impacting the lives of Washington citizens — trial court operations, with an additional \$53.8 million needed for courts across the state; public or “indigent” defense, with an additional \$131.9 million needed for defense of low-income residents; and civil legal services, with an additional \$18.3 million needed to help vulnerable citizens with serious legal problems regarding housing, employment, and family safety.

**The Task Force also concluded that the state should share more equitably in funding trial courts and indigent defense** — recommending a roughly 50-percent split — which would help stabilize court funding and make it more equitable across the state.

While local government currently bears nearly 90% of the burden of funding the trial courts and indigent defense services for criminal and dependency cases, the Task Force concluded that the state has a strong interest in the operations of the trial courts and should be a partner with local government in their funding.

The Task Force developed a model to assess the state’s participation based on those areas where a strong connection or “nexus” is most clear between state actions or state mandates and the costs of court operations; the Task Force concluded these areas should be funded by the state. The items identified included judges’ salaries at superior, district, and municipal courts; the verbatim records of proceedings; mandatory arbitration; juvenile dependency representation; guardians’ ad litem in dependency cases; interpreters; criminal defense; juror fees; and mileage and witness costs.

After establishing the amount of unmet need and finalizing its report in late 2004, the state’s Board for Judicial Administration developed starting-point recommendations for change to three crucial areas of trial court operations, indigent defense, and civil legal services.

In addition to its proposal for trial court funding reform, the Court Funding Task Force examined the structure and court funding issues in Washington State’s courts of limited jurisdiction. The Task Force concluded that local jurisdictions would benefit from a less fragmented set of statutory options for providing court services. Ultimately a more regionalized court structure with additional state financial support would achieve economies of scale savings and provide a more consistent level of services to citizens.



In 2001, crowded court calendars in one county delayed the trial of a violent felon two days beyond speedy trial deadlines. Released from jail, he broke into the home of a young mother and raped her, and while fleeing from police, crashed his vehicle into a motorist, killing the innocent bystander instantly.

## SELECTED PRINCIPLES FOR TRIAL COURT FUNDING

“Washington court funding is not adequate, is not stable, and is seriously uneven across the state from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. It substantially interferes with our trial courts’ ability to perform their core functions at all levels.”

—Washington Supreme Court Chief Justice Gerry Alexander

- Trial courts are critical to maintaining the rule of law in a free society; they are essential to the protection of the rights and enforcement of obligations for all.
- Trial courts must have adequate, stable, and long-term funding to meet their legal obligations.
- Trial court funding must be adequate to provide for the administration of justice equally across the state.
- Legislative bodies (whether municipal, county, or state) have the responsibility to adequately fund the trial courts.
- The state has an interest in the effective operation of trial courts and the adequacy of trial court funding. Therefore, the state should contribute equitably to achieve a better balance of funding between local and state government.
- Trial courts are not self-funding. The imposition of fines, penalties, forfeitures and assessments by trial courts are for the purpose of punishment and deterrence, and must not be linked to the funding of trial courts.

In the short term, the Task Force proposed changes to Title 3 that support a collaborative regional approach to provision of district and municipal court services. These include expanding the role and membership of the county districting committee and updating statutory provisions authorizing municipalities and counties to provide joint court services by interlocal agreement. The Task Force also concluded that all judges in courts of limited jurisdiction should be elected to promote accountability and the independence of the judiciary.

Ultimately, the proposals to reform operations and funding structure serve as the starting point of a long-term court funding reform effort in Washington State. **At the core of each BJA recommendation is a simple premise that equal justice is not a goal to strive for. Rather it is the basic foundation of a just society.**

“We cannot continue to jeopardize the judicial branch in Washington State with a lack of funding,” said Court Funding Task Force Chair Wayne Blair. “To do so ignores Reverend King’s proclamation and produces an unjust and unfair court system.”



The public defense crisis in Grant County has led to numerous instances in which defendants were found to have received ineffective and incompetent legal representation.

# Study Unearths Alarming Information

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A ground-breaking study on the civil legal needs of Washington's low-income residents showed that gaps in access to services were wider and deeper than justice officials had feared.

The in-depth study was completed in 2003 for use by the Civil Equal Justice Task Force, appointed by the state Supreme Court to explore whether the state's poor and vulnerable residents have meaningful access to the state's civil justice system.

Access to the civil justice system had never been studied in Washington.

"It was much bleaker than any of us suspected," said Jim Bamberger, a member of the Task Force and a coordinator for a statewide legal aid agency.

The study found that only 15 percent of low-income Washington residents who reported they struggled with civil legal problems got help with serious situations that could leave them homeless, unemployed, without medical care, or in physical danger.

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## THE STUDY FOUND:

- Each year, Washington’s low-income residents face more than one million urgent civil legal problems. These most often involve basic needs such as housing, employment, and family safety.
- More than 75 percent of low-income households struggle with at least one important civil legal problem each year.
- Only 15 percent of those with problems get any help, meaning 85 percent face their legal problems alone.
- Women and children have more civil legal problems than the general population.
- Civil justice problems for the low-income and vulnerable tend to involve more basic needs (such as housing discrimination, employment, child support, no-contact orders) than civil justice problems of people with higher incomes.
- Women and children have more civil legal problems than the general population.
- Low-income residents listed several reasons for not seeking help — they didn’t know there were laws to protect them; they didn’t know where to go for help; they were fearful; they couldn’t afford legal help; they had language barriers.

The “Civil Legal Needs Study” involved three prongs — an in-depth field survey involving face-to-face interviews with 1,300 low-income residents by researchers from the Portland State University Department of Sociology; a telephone survey of more than 800 randomly selected low- and moderate-income residents by the Washington State University Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (SESRC); and a statewide survey of stakeholders such as judges, court personnel, legal service providers, social workers, and others.

The study was commissioned after the Washington Supreme Court created the Task Force, concerned that budget cuts were severely impacting access to justice for the state’s poor. The justices knew from legal aid advocates that the state’s population had grown significantly between 1980 and 1999, yet the number of legal aid attorneys had shrunk from 140 to 105.

Until the study was complete, there was no way of knowing what the impact of those cuts had been.

“The findings of the study really are troubling,” said Division One Appeals Court Judge Mary Kay Becker, co-chair of the Task Force. “Theoretically, there should be no problems. But there are indeed differences in access.”

The study illustrated that over the past years, civil justice for the poor “has been a story of cutbacks and crisis and lurching from one problem to another,” she said.

The Task Force planned to use the new information to create recommendations for improving the civil justice system, particularly improving access for low-income residents.

“Now, more than ever,” said Chief Justice Gerry Alexander, “the right to equal justice needs to be protected for the poor and vulnerable.”

# *Easier Access To Ethics Education*

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Ethics education for judicial officers was boosted in September 2004 when a new online ethics education program was launched by the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC).

Not only does the program provide additional ethics teaching, it offers the education in a new format for busy judges and commissioners who can log on to the Washington Courts Web site at any time and work on course units.

“Judicial Ethics” was developed by the Ethics Advisory Committee and AOC staff members as a way to help judicial officers meet new mandatory education requirements. Effective January 2003, a requirement was implemented that all Washington judges and commissioners complete 45 continuing education credits over each three-year span; the 45 credits include six credits in ethics. The education is required for all judicial levels and for part-time officers as well. Only pro tem judges are exempt.

An additional advantage of the online ethics course is that new judicial officers can get some immediate ethics training, including answers to common ethics questions, rather than wait for a class to become available.

Topics for the online course units were chosen based on the most common questions asked of the Ethics Advisory Committee. Each answer also provides a link to the applicable Code of Judicial Conduct (CJC) canon and to any Ethics Advisory Opinion on the topic, so judges can explore further. Judges and commissioners can earn a .25 credit in each of eight course units — civic and charitable activities, issues surrounding part-time judges, requests for letters of recommendation, campaign activities, serving on law-related boards, speaking at events and taking public positions, fundraising and Bar Association activities, and miscellaneous topics.

“It’s going to be very helpful for our new judges,” said Nancy Sullins, Legal Services Manager for the AOC.

The online program provides instructions for judicial officers on applying to receive educational credits for completing the programs. Credits are awarded by a committee which reviews applications and information submitted by judicial officers.

Although judicial officers can only earn up to one credit of ethics education a year through self-study — the online course qualifies as self-study — the course units are also available as information any time a judge wants to explore one of these areas of common questions.

# Washington Justice Is 150 Years Young

The Washington court system celebrated its 150th birthday in 2003, marking the anniversary with a display in the Temple of Justice which illustrated that early justice could — literally — be a battle.

The celebration and new long-term display coincided with the state's sesquicentennial, commemorating the year 1853 when Washington was made a territory. The territorial justice system was formed the same year.

Creating a justice system on paper, however, was a very different thing from bringing it to life in the rough Northwest. Problems started early when territorial justices were appointed by the President, but failed to appear. Even more alarming to settlers were justices who appeared, but had little or no understanding of frontier life and issues.

Because of that, citizens writing the state constitution insisted on an elected judiciary.

Judicial independence was also an early battle which involved armed troops and citizens taking sides between a Governor and two territorial judges.

The conflict erupted in 1856 during a two-year war with Washington Indian tribes over reservation lands. Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens ordered some farmers with Indian wives to leave the area, saying he could not trust them.

The farmers refused, and when a territorial court in Pierce County took up the dispute, Stevens declared martial law and closed the court. Territorial Supreme Court Justice Edward Lander defied Stevens and opened the district court in Steilacoom. Stevens sent troops to arrest the judge and 30 armed citizens surrounded the courthouse to protect Lander.

Lander went peacefully to avoid bloodshed, but as soon as he was released he opened court in Olympia and ordered Stevens to appear before him. Stevens had him arrested again, but Judge F. A. Chenoweth reopened the Steilacoom court with 50 armed citizens for protection. The angry crowd succeeded in turning back troops sent to arrest Chenoweth, who immediately wrote that Stevens' actions were "a monstrous assumption of arbitrary power without the shadow of legal authority."

Stevens backed down, lifted martial law, and released Lander and the farmers. Stevens was reprimanded by President Franklin Pierce for over-stepping his authority and fined by Lander for contempt of court. Rather than pay the fine, the Governor pardoned himself.

Early justices also helped shape the state's identity with such decisions as granting Indian fishing rights (1854), halting attempts to move the state capitol to Vancouver (late 1800s), and affirming women's rights to be attorneys and serve on juries (1884).

The exhibit highlighting the history of the state's justice system will be a long-term display housed in the Temple of Justice. It includes large graphic displays on various topics dealt with in the historic courts — Indian rights and women's rights are two examples — as well as historic photos, old newspapers, and other illustrations of court history.



# Trial Court Coordination Councils Emerge

The more people  
working on a problem,  
the easier it is to fix.

That is the philosophy behind Trial Court Coordination Councils (TCCC's), which began emerging around the state in 2003 after the Board for Judicial Administration (BJA) passed a resolution encouraging their creation.

Counties across the state found they had justice problems that could be better solved if their trial courts, as well as jails, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and community groups, worked together. TCCC's include work in areas as diverse as resolving conflicting protection orders, promoting flexibility in out-of-the-way courts, handling mental illness and substance abuse, interpreter training, and transportation difficulties.

"There's a need for interaction and dialog between the courts all the time," said Bainbridge Island Municipal Court Judge Stephen Holman, serving as chairman of Kitsap County's Trial Court Coordination Council. "It's very encouraging what's been done."

The birth of coordination councils goes back to Project 2001, an intense review of the state justice system that involved more than 140 judges, attorneys, citizens, court managers, and lawmakers from around the state.

After months of review, the Task Force developed dozens of recommendations for improving the justice system. Its first recommendation — number 1.1 on page 1 — was creation of trial court coordination councils throughout the state to boost cooperation and collaboration among courts and justice entities, along with solving problems unique to each community.

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## PROJECTS COMPLETED OR STARTED IN 2003 INCLUDE:

- Kitsap County's Council solved a problem in which residents of an island with only a municipal court were continually being turned away when asking for anti-harassment restraining orders, because such orders can only come from higher courts. The Council agreed to make all municipal court judges into pro-tem district court judges who could approve the initial requests and schedule hearings in district court.
- Kitsap also created a new process that keeps domestic violence suspects in jail unless they have a no-contact order before leaving. The process involves having pre-signed no-contact orders at the jail, which personnel are trained in handling, for those time frames when judges and courts are not available.
- King County's Council began working on interpreter scheduling through a new Web site, coordinating job training among different courts, processing of warrants in multiple jurisdictions, a centralized jury pool, expansion of electronic recording in courts, and more.
- King's County's Council is also working to establish a unified substance abuse and mental illness court, or "dual disorder" court, including work on linking the courts with shared technology and data.
- Island County installed video conferencing equipment to save on private charter flights that have been used to ferry prisoners from jail to San Juan County courts.
- Yakima's TCCC helped to consolidate the administration of the superior, district, and juvenile courts. The Council has explored consolidating probation services.
- Pierce County's Council coordinated domestic violence training for different court levels, worked to provide some district court services in Gig Harbor Municipal Court, and helped courts with a new digital audio system.

A TCCC typically includes judicial officers from a county's superior, district, and municipal courts; court administrators; and county clerks; often representatives of the county prosecutor's office, public defenders, the local jail, county and city officials; and community groups such as those battling domestic violence.

To help ensure that coordination councils would be formed, the BJA added start-up money to its resolution, with awards to counties that formed councils, created coordination plans, and then identified projects to be carried out in cooperation.

The first round of projects was successful enough that the BJA allocated a second round of grants — totaling \$75,000 — to support additional projects and the creation of more coordination councils.

Trial Court Coordination Councils emphasize both the crucial need for courts to work together and the importance of maintaining local options so courts can develop innovative approaches consistent with their local legal needs and culture, according to the Project 2001 report.



# *Trials Are Still Speedy, But Now More Flexible*

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Washington's time-for-trial rules were changed for the first time in more than two decades in order to reduce the chance that criminal cases would be dismissed because of scheduling technicalities.

The 2003 changes to the time-for-trial rules — which were originally adopted in 1980 — were also implemented to simplify and clarify speedy-trial provisions and to increase court accountability, but maintained harsh penalties for delaying trials.

The changes were recommended by a task force that was established in 2002, after a man raped a woman and killed a motorist as he was fleeing the crime. The man had been released from prison the year before after a conviction was overturned because he had not been tried within the strict time-for-trial requirements. His case had been continued because of lack of available courtrooms, which raised questions about the state's rules.

A brief study undertaken by the task force estimated that more than 200 charges a year around the state were dismissed or reduced because of time-for-trial violations.

The task force searched for ways to ensure two essential elements — 1) that criminal cases would not be dismissed for minor, technical violations of the time-for-trial rules, and 2) that the crucial right to timely trials and a defense based on witness retention and accurate memories would be preserved.

“This court rule is of great significance to the citizens of Washington,” said task force chairman David Boerner, a professor at Seattle University School of Law.

The task force did not recommend throwing out the 60-day deadline for prosecuting those who remain in custody, the 90-day deadline for those not in custody, or the severe penalty of dismissing cases with prejudice for unnecessary delays.

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## THE CHANGES TO MAKE THE RULE MORE FLEXIBLE AND REALISTIC INCLUDE:

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- A proposed “cure” period that would give courts an additional but brief time, after a defendant’s 60/90-day period is done, to get a case heard. A motion to cure must be brought no later than five days after the time expires.
- A proposed 30-day buffer period after an interruption of the 60/90 requirement — such as time approved for mental health evaluation — to ensure all parties have at least 30 days to prepare for trial after the interruption.
- A requirement that all trial courts report each instance where a case is dismissed because of time-for-trial violations and each time a cure period is used. This will allow timing problems to be tracked and evaluated.
- Simplifying and clarifying many provisions in the rule.
- In the case of defendants who are charged but not in custody — many cannot be found — requiring judges to decide at the beginning of a case what steps are necessary to locate a defendant. In many cases, requirements for locating defendants would be unclear, and convictions would be overturned on appeal.

**THE SUPREME COURT**

9 justices (elected to six-year terms)

- Appeals from the Court of Appeals
- Direct appeals when action of state officers is involved, the constitutionality of a statute is questioned, there are conflicting statutes or rules of law, or when the issue is of broad public interest
- Final rule-making body for other state courts
- Administers state court system
- Supervises attorney discipline statewide

**THE COURT OF APPEALS**

22 judges (elected to six-year terms)

Division I, Seattle 10; Division II, Tacoma 7; Division III, Spokane 5

- Appeals from the lower courts except those in jurisdiction of the Supreme Court

**THE SUPERIOR COURTS**

177 judges (elected to four-year terms in 31 judicial districts, each composed of one or more counties)

- Exclusive original jurisdiction in all civil matters involving a dollar amount over \$50,000; title or possession of real property; legality of a tax, assessment or toll; probate and domestic matters
- Original jurisdiction in all criminal cases amounting to felony
- Original jurisdiction in all criminal cases when jurisdiction is not otherwise provided for by law
- Exclusive original jurisdiction over juvenile matters
- Orders for protection from domestic violence
- Appeals from the courts of limited jurisdiction heard de novo or appealed on the record for error of law

**THE COURTS OF LIMITED JURISDICTION**

218 judges; 211 attorneys and 9 non-attorney (113 district court judges, elected to four-year terms, and 105 municipal court judges\*)

**DISTRICT COURTS**

44 courts established by 39 counties in 56 locations  
121 municipalities contract for services from district courts

**MUNICIPAL COURTS**

125 courts established by cities

- Concurrent jurisdiction with superior courts in all misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor actions with maximum fine of \$5,000 or less and/or jail sentence of one year or less in violation of state, county, or county/municipal ordinances
- Jurisdiction in all matters involving traffic, non-traffic, and parking infractions
- Orders for protection from domestic violence
- Civil antiharassment matters
- Civil impoundment matters
- Concurrent jurisdiction with superior courts over civil actions involving \$50,000 or less\*\*
- Small claims up to \$4,000\*\*
- Preliminary hearings of felonies\*\*

\* Judges may sit in multiple municipal courts.

\*\* District courts only.











WASHINGTON  
COURTS