

## Kitsap's Criminal Defendants Now Making Court Appearances Via Camera

By Josh Farley

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PORT ORCHARD — The long wooden benches where the defendants are seated is one of the few things in the small corner of the Kitsap County jail that resembles a courtroom.

Yet court is in session.

When their time comes to face the judge for their initial appearance, defendants are seated in an office chair in front of a television. Their rights are reviewed, documents are scrutinized and their bail is debated between prosecutor (who's in the courtroom with the judge) and public defender (who's at the jail).

When the proceedings are complete, the defendants are escorted back to the jail pod from which they came.

Before mid-April, defendants accused of felony crimes endured a far different process to appear in court. But the old system of chaining them together, marching them through jail and courthouse and putting them in the jury box for initial appearances is now a thing of the past.

"It is about the security," said Ned Newlin, chief of the Kitsap County jail. "It's not just for the public, but for the defendant we're bringing before the court."

Kitsap County jail Lt. Genie Elton points out that the video system also removes some anxiety for victims of alleged crimes. For victims, the video monitoring is less personal than sitting in a courtroom just feet away from a defendant, she said.

The new system saves time by allowing jail staff to immediately enter the results of the defendant's appearance into their database instead of writing them down and typing them in later.

The video system is part of an array of changes [aimed at making local courts more efficient](#). More documents are being sent electronically instead of faxed, which saves paper and time. More emphasis is being placed on preparing cases expeditiously — prosecutor's initial case filings include a plea offer from the get-go — to settle them more quickly.

Jailed defendants are brought to court to face the judge as the case progresses. But bringing a single person to court accompanied by a corrections officer isn't the security risk that, say, a dozen defendants are, points out Maury Baker, Kitsap County District Court administrator.

A video system was already being used in the jail for those facing charges in the area's municipal courts. The new equipment was added to a Kitsap County district courtroom.

Several county funds were used to pay for the video system. The prosecutor's office's forfeiture fund pitched in about \$15,000, according to Kitsap County Prosecutor Russell Hauge.

