

Washington State Judicial Branch

2023-25 Biennial Budget

Launch Security Matching Grant Program

Agency: Administrative Office of the Courts

Decision Package Code/Title: T1 – Launch Security Matching Grant Pgm

Agency Recommendation Summary Text:

The Administrative Office of the Courts, on behalf of the Court Security Task Force, requests \$5 million in General Fund-State funding to distribute through matching grants to small and rural courts for the purpose of securing their court facilities. This will allow these courts to purchase the basic security equipment and services that they need in order to provide safe access to justice to the communities of Washington State. (General Fund-State)

Fiscal Summary:

	FY 2024	FY 2025	Biennial	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennial
Staffing						
FTEs	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Operating Expenditures						
Fund 001-1	\$3,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$5,000,000
Total Expenditures						
	\$3,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$3,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$5,000,000

Package Description:

Inadequate security in courthouses has been a major concern and a high priority for Washington courts for years. The Court Security Task Force convened in 2019 to identify the courts with significant security needs and develop funding strategies so that all courts can meet the GR 36 minimum standards. The task force conducted a comprehensive needs assessment for over 110 courts reporting that they did not meet all of the minimum standards. The judicial branch adopted these national standards in [General Rule 36](#), and many courthouses in Washington are striving to meet them. These standards reflect the best practices in courthouse safety and contain seven minimum security standards that courts should endeavor to meet (security plan, audits, entry screening, cameras, duress alarms, emergency notification systems, and active shooter training).

Many of our courts in small rural jurisdictions have not been able to meet the standards, primarily due to the lack of funding at the state and local levels. Consequently, these facilities are unprepared for a serious security event:

- They lack the screening equipment and court security officers to provide entry screening or to prevent dangerous people and items from entering the courthouse;
- They lack the basic security equipment like cameras, duress alarms and emergency broadcast systems needed to respond to security incidents; and
- They have not had a security audit in order to prioritize and address their security vulnerabilities.

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), on behalf of the Court Security Task Force, requests \$5 million in ongoing funding to establish the WA Rural & Small Court Security Matching Grant Program. This program will fill a

critical gap in keeping Washingtonians safe when they're accessing justice. AOC plans to maximize the impact of the funding by taking the following steps:

- Limit the funding to small rural courts that are located in economically distressed areas as established by criteria such as a low tax base, small revenue, and high poverty rates.
- Require local funding entities to share the cost by funding some proportion of the security needs. The sharing requirement will range from 10 percent to 50 percent.

Fully describe and quantify expected impacts on state residents and specific populations served:

Victims and litigants in rural courthouses need safe access to justice

117 victim advocates surveyed in 2020 said they are concerned for their safety and the safety of victims in courthouses across the state. Over 60 percent of advocates experienced one or more security incidents that range from harassment and threats to physical assaults on courthouse premises. Over 75 percent of advocates said that their client expressed concerns about personal safety in the courthouse.

The challenges faced by courts in rural counties to provide safe public access

In a 2020 survey of all Washington courts, the data revealed that courts in rural counties were much less likely to meet the minimum standards due to a lack of funding. Maintaining a safe and secure courthouse is a key priority for judges. However, the funding to implement security measures is under the scope of local governments.

Smaller and/or rural jurisdictions often do not have the financial resources to implement court security measures. The lack of funding for security improvements exposes the public and court personnel to the threat of serious harm and injury. Domestic and intimate partner violence cases, family court disputes, sexual assaults, and contentious civil cases are already emotionally charged situations. Additionally, there are increasing numbers of court participants with untreated behavioral health and substance disorder challenges that further increase the risk of security incidents that compromise public safety and can lead to tragic and preventable injuries and fatalities.

State funding is critical to address the risks to public safety and protect the members of the community who access these smaller courthouses and court personnel who are working in unsafe and non-secure environments.

Explain what alternatives were explored by the agency and why they were rejected as solutions:

AOC has regularly explored federal and private grants, but there are no options available. Federal DOJ grants to protect public spaces are available in Statistically Metro Areas, but the courts that need funding are in rural counties. The federal Justice Assistance Grant and Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Grant are both limited in scope and do not serve the needs of the vast majority of Washington Courts. Without federal or private funding, the only option is state and local funding, and in local areas with limited revenue resources, state funding is invaluable and critical to keeping Washingtonians safe.

What are the consequences of not funding this request?

Rural courts have not been immune to acts of violence. Yes, security is expensive, but inadequate security may be even more costly. In addition to the high human costs of suffering and the devastation to families, communities, and courts, lawsuits can cost several times more than adequately funding a secure courthouse.

Without state funding support to secure these small and rural courts, Washingtonians accessing justice – most of whom are at the courthouse involuntarily – will remain vulnerable to potential acts of violence. They will continue to be intimidated by the prospect that the opposing party may be carrying weapons; they will fear accessing justice, something anathema in a free society.

Is this an expansion or alteration of a current program or service?

An appropriation of \$750,000 in the 2021-2023 biennium budget helped courts in shared sites, (i.e. a Superior and District court residing in the same building) obtain items necessary to improve security in their courthouses. These

courts were able to purchase some limited security equipment with the grants, but most of the shared site courts need more funding to meet the minimum security standards and hire court security officers to use the equipment.

Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions:

Staffing Assumptions

Beginning July 1, 2023 and ongoing, AOC requires salary, benefits, and associated standard costs for a Senior Court Program Analyst to administer the grant program.

Other Non-Standard Costs

Grants and Training (Objects E & N)

This project would distribute grants to small and rural courts for the purpose of purchasing security equipment, hiring staff to operate that equipment, contracting for security audits, and offering security training to identify security concerns.

	<u>FY 2024</u>	<u>FY 2025</u>	<u>FY 2026</u>	<u>FY 2027</u>	<u>FY 2028</u>	<u>FY 2029</u>
Expenditures by Object						
A Salaries and Wages	101,100	101,100	101,100	101,100	101,100	101,100
B Employee Benefits	32,200	32,200	32,200	32,200	32,200	32,200
E Goods and Services	23,800	23,800	23,800	23,800	23,800	23,800
G Travel	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500
J Capital Outlays	6,400	1,600	1,600	1,600	1,600	1,600
N Grants, Benefits, and Client Services	2,801,000	1,805,800	2,805,800	1,805,000	2,805,800	1,805,000
T Intra-Agency Reimbursements	33,000	33,000	33,000	33,000	33,000	33,000
Total Objects	3,000,000	2,000,000	3,000,000	2,000,000	3,000,000	2,000,000

Staffing Job Class	Salary	<u>FY 2024</u>	<u>FY 2025</u>	<u>FY 2026</u>	<u>FY 2027</u>	<u>FY 2028</u>	<u>FY 2029</u>
SENIOR COURT PROGRAM ANALYST	101,100	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Total FTEs		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Explanation of standard costs by object:

Salary estimates are current biennium actual rates at Step L.

Benefits are the agency average of 31.89% of salaries.

Goods and Services are the agency average of \$3,800 per direct program FTE.

Travel is the agency average of \$2,500 per direct program FTE.

One-time IT Equipment is \$4,800 for the first fiscal year per direct program FTE. Ongoing Equipment is the agency average of \$1,600 per direct program FTE.

Agency Indirect is calculated at a rate of 24.73% of direct program salaries and benefits.

How does the package relate to the Judicial Branch principal policy objectives?

Administration of Justice: Citizens expect to be safe when they enter a public courthouse. Funding to improve court security will help courts ensure that citizens' rights to safety are respected. Victims of domestic and intimate partner violence, participants in child custody matters, and other victims are especially vulnerable when courts do not have adequate security in place.

Accessibility: Maintaining safe access to public facilities is critical. Courthouses that are unable to meet basic safety requirements because they lack the funding pose a potential barrier for victims and witnesses, citizens filing protection orders, children coming to court for interviews, and other members of the community.

Are there impacts to other governmental entities?

Other tenants in the court facilities, such as local executive and legislative entities, will benefit from the additional security provided in these facilities.

Stakeholder response:

Victim Advocate and Attorney Associations are on the task force and support funding for security improvements

Are there legal or administrative mandates that require this package to be funded?

No

Does current law need to be changed to successfully implement this package?

No

Are there impacts to state facilities?

No

Are there other supporting materials that strengthen the case for this request?

- Interim Data Report https://www.courts.wa.gov/programs_orgs/pos_bja/?fa=pos_bja.courtSecurityTF
- Courthouse Security: From the lens of the victim advocate Report (complete in September)

Are there information technology impacts?

There are no information technology impacts related to this request.

Agency Contacts:

Christopher Stanley, 360-357-2406, christopher.stanley@courts.wa.gov

Angie Wirkkala, 360-704-5528, angie.wirkkala@courts.wa.gov