

# Washington State Judicial Branch 2025-27 Biennial Budget Continue Securing Small & Rural Courts

**Agency:** Administrative Office of the Courts

**Decision Package Code/Title:** AB – Continue Securing Courts

## Agency Recommendation Summary Text:

The Administrative Office of the Courts, on behalf of the Court Security Task Force, requests \$250,000 per year in ongoing in order to secure small and rural courts. 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. (General Fund-State)

## Fiscal Summary:

	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennial	FY 2028	FY 2029	Biennial
<b>Staffing</b>						
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.00
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>						
Fund 001-1	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$500,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$500,000
<b>Total Expenditures</b>						
	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$500,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$500,000

## Package Description:

Incidents and threats affecting court staff increase every year. 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 [General Rule 36](#) (GR) 36 minimum, national 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 GR 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 need to meet:

- Security plan
- Audits
- Entry screening
- Cameras
- Duress alarms
- Emergency notification systems
- 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 both the state and local levels. These facilities are unprepared for a serious security event because:

- 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

- Aging equipment in need of replacement results in higher failure rates than new equipment which can take advantage of newer software-based security enhancements.

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), on behalf of the Court Security Task Force, requests \$500,000 in funding to continue the Washington Small & Rural Court Security Program. During the 2023-25 biennial budget, the Legislature appropriated \$1 million per year for this program.

- In Fiscal Year 2024, courts requested \$1,393,798.95 in funding for security equipment and services.
- In Fiscal Year 2025, courts requested \$1,369,520.95 in funding for security equipment and services.

This left an average shortfall of about \$380,000. Additional funding requests from courts who sought funding outside of application periods pushed the shortfall higher and implementation or installation costs frequently pushed expenses higher than the awarded amount.

Continuing this program will fill a critical gap in keeping Washingtonians safe when they're accessing justice in historically economically distressed areas. 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.**

One-hundred seventeen 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. Additionally, court submitted incident reports indicate that jury members and victims have experienced harassing behavior at courthouses.

While threats to safety can be deterred by the presence of security personnel and security equipment, it is difficult to quantify a reduction in incidents when they are more frequently observed by on-site security personnel. Between 2018 and 2024, 134 incidents were reported where security personnel intervened in an ongoing or developing event with positive outcomes. While we accept that we cannot prevent all security incidents from occurring, the goal of enhancing security is to navigate incidents to arrive at the ideal outcome. The December 2022 incident where an individual entered the Snohomish County courthouse with body armor and several firearms, initiating a standoff with security personnel who were able to intercept him due to security cameras on-site stands as a stark reminder of the importance of adequately secured courthouses in protecting both employees and the public who use courthouse services.

**Explain what alternatives were explored by the agency and why this was the best option chosen.**

Federal funding (Justice Assistance Grant) was explored. However, this funding is designed to get programs started, and not to support existing programs. It is frequently awarded to local programs aimed at reducing crimes in the community. Efforts to support local requests for funding from city and counties has greater success when the funding is supplemented by state funds.

**What are the consequences of not funding this request?**

Security equipment and service minimum standards will continue to go unmet, and security equipment reaching its end of life, such as metal detectors, emergency alert systems, and cameras will not be replaced or kept operable.

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

No, this is a continuation of an established grant program.

An appropriation of \$750,000 in the 2021-23 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:**

**Other Non-Standard Costs**

*Pass-Thru Funding to Courts.* Distribute grants to small and rural courts for the purpose of purchasing security equipment, hiring staff to operate that equipment, and contracting for security audits to ensure security.

<b>Expenditures by Object</b>	<b><u>FY 2026</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2027</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2028</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2029</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2030</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2031</u></b>
N Grants, Benefits & Client Services	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000	250,000

**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.

**How does the package impact equity in the state?**

**Address any target populations or communities that will benefit from this proposal.**

Court users from historically under-funded areas will benefit from increased courthouse security through enhanced safe access to justice.

**Describe the how the agency conducted community outreach and engagement.**

It's important to note that direct discussions with courts indicate that local budget cuts have impacted security operations. Funding provided by the state has been instrumental in filling the gap to maintain security measures.

Several surveys have been conducted, both formally and informally, which indicate an ongoing need for court security funding throughout the state:

In 2017, the Board for Judicial Administration (BJA) surveyed Superior Courts in Washington. Their findings indicated that 50% of Washington's Superior Courts lack entry screening. (Washington State Courthouse Security Report)

In 2019 a Court Security Needs Assessment was conducted in which 111 of 224 trial courts reported inadequate security measures. (BJA Court Security Task Force Interim Data Report)

A security audit sign-up was sent out in 2023, which revealed that 41.6% of responding courts indicated they had experienced a security incident in the last three years.

Security funding applications from 2021-2025 include questions about security standards in place at the court requesting funding. All courts requesting funding during 2021-2025 lacked one or more GR 36 minimum security standards (entry screening, security cameras, duress alarms, emergency broadcast systems, and active shooter training).

**Consider which target populations or communities would be disproportionately impacted by this proposal. Explain why and how these equity impacts will be mitigated.**

Funding being restricted to small and rural courts leaves urban areas to self-fund security improvements. Reports from court staff indicate that security incidents occur in both urban and rural areas.

**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:**

The Court Security Committee consists of judges, administrators, and security professionals who 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?**

- FY 2024 & FY 2025 Applicant GR 36 minimum standard reports can be anonymized and made available to illustrate existing needs.
  - [https://www.courts.wa.gov/court\\_rules/pdf/GR/GA\\_GR\\_36\\_00\\_00.pdf](https://www.courts.wa.gov/court_rules/pdf/GR/GA_GR_36_00_00.pdf)
- Full Court Press Court Security Incident Article
  - <https://www.courts.wa.gov/newsinfo/content/FullCourtPress2024Volume2.cfm>
- Washington State Courthouse Security Report (2018)
  - [https://www.courts.wa.gov/content/publicUpload/Reports/Courthouse\\_Security\\_Report-2018.pdf](https://www.courts.wa.gov/content/publicUpload/Reports/Courthouse_Security_Report-2018.pdf)
- BJA Court Security Task Force Final Report
  - [https://www.courts.wa.gov/programs\\_orgs/pos\\_bja/sectf/Court%20Security%20Task%20Force%20Final%20Report%2009\\_07\\_23.pdf](https://www.courts.wa.gov/programs_orgs/pos_bja/sectf/Court%20Security%20Task%20Force%20Final%20Report%2009_07_23.pdf)
- BJA Court Security Task Force Interim Data Report
  - <https://www.courts.wa.gov/content/publicUpload/Court%20Security/Court%20Security%20Task%20Force%20Interim%20Report%202020.pdf>

Administrative Office of the Courts  
Policy Level – AB – Continue Securing Courts

- BJA Court Security Task Force Security Funding One Pager
  - [https://www.courts.wa.gov/programs\\_orgs/pos\\_bja/taskForce/pdf/Small%20Rural%20Court%20Security%20Matching%20Program%20One%20Pager%202023.pdf](https://www.courts.wa.gov/programs_orgs/pos_bja/taskForce/pdf/Small%20Rural%20Court%20Security%20Matching%20Program%20One%20Pager%202023.pdf)

**Are there information technology impacts?**

No

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