

# Washington State Judicial Branch 2025-27 Biennial Budget Enhance Behavioral Health Program

**Agency:** Administrative Office of the Courts

**Decision Package Code/Title:** BK – Enhance Behavioral Health Program

## Agency Recommendation Summary Text:

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) requests \$780,000 and 2.0 FTEs ongoing to operate the Behavioral Health Program. With these funds, AOC will: 1) establish a central location for therapeutic court data and 2) hire a Sequential Intercept Model Coordinator. The Legislature previously funded the program to address education, technical assistance, and supports for therapeutic courts, and while that initiative is a success, courts need even more data and technical assistance support. (General Fund-State, General Fund-Federal)

## Fiscal Summary:

	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennial	FY 2028	FY 2029	Biennial
<b>Staffing</b>						
FTEs	2.00	2.00	<b>2.00</b>	2.00	2.00	<b>2.00</b>
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>						
Fund 001-1	\$396,000	\$384,000	<b>\$780,000</b>	\$384,000	\$384,000	<b>\$768,000</b>
<b>Total Expenditures</b>						
	<b>\$396,000</b>	<b>\$384,000</b>	<b>\$780,000</b>	<b>\$384,000</b>	<b>\$384,000</b>	<b>\$768,000</b>

## Package Description:

Therapeutic court programs provide services and support to individuals charged with criminal offense who are experiencing behavioral health issues such as substance abuse disorder (SUD) and serious mental illness (SMI). Therapeutic courts ensure offenders receive appropriate care while being held accountable for their actions. In 2021, the Administrative Office of the Courts started the Behavioral Health Program (BHP) to create relationships with all court levels and across state and local behavioral health agencies. Currently, the BHP supports over 140 therapeutic courts in Washington through technical assistance, training opportunities, and the Courts of Limited Jurisdiction Therapeutic Courts funding program.

The BHP was also tasked by the Legislature with applying the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) – a model providing a “picture” of how people with SMI and SUD flow through the criminal justice system and eventually return to the community in jurisdictions across the state. The BHP has made it possible for 24, cross agency partners to become trained SIM facilitators, coordinated and facilitated SIM events, and led a SIM Pilot Program directed by the Legislature in 2023. SIM facilitators include professionals from the Department of Health, Washington State Association of Policy Chiefs and Sheriffs, Health Care Authority, college professors, and mental health program supervisors from regional Behavioral Health Administrative Services organizations.

The BHP’s establishment, growth, and success since 2021 has resulted in the need for two additional staff.

First, a new Research Associate will be responsible for establishing a central warehouse of therapeutic court data from across Washington. The researcher will also develop reports that therapeutic courts can use to better understand their clients, process, and results. Statewide data on therapeutic court utilization and outcomes will support targeted

problem-solving for local courts and state-level behavioral health programs. The data will also support collaborative management between courts and their local partner agencies, including behavioral health, law enforcement, housing, and other community services. It will boost statewide capacity to utilize and review data on therapeutic court use, covering entries, exits, outcomes, and recidivism. The new staff will join two existing researchers on the BHP who devote their time to process evaluations, implementation support, and outcome evaluations. The large and increasing number of therapeutic courts in the state requires support for local management, along with transparency and accountability to stakeholders, if the therapeutic courts are to realize their potential for effective and equitable outcomes. Although the work of our current researchers is important, their time is fully consumed with their current assigned duties. They have neither the time nor expertise to build a back-end system to capture and collate the data entered into court management systems.

Second, a position will be wholly devoted as a Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) Coordinator. SIM expansion was a requirement of the original BHP design. We have learned the need and desire for SIM work across the state is greater than expected and has led to implementation of local programs that bolster community collaboration and opportunity for local and outside funding capability. We need a dedicated staff to coordinate events, facilitators, venues and contracts to perform SIM in communities. This role will also be tasked with updating and maintaining the presentation materials, build after SIM reports, action plans and support community workgroups to implement plans built on the information garnered through SIM events.

**Fully describe and quantify expected impacts on state residents.**

These staff will have a positive impact on Washington residents. Creating a central warehouse of therapeutic court entries across the state will give the AOC the ability to collect data and track the success of therapeutic court program participants on metrics such as recidivism, relapse, graduation rates, time in program, etc. Monitoring will lead to recommendations that are responsive to trends emerging in therapeutic courts demographics.

The SIM Coordinator will help courts and communities identify and address the gaps in diversion opportunities and access to treatment and services that residents involved in, or at risk of becoming involved in the justice system, encounter. The impact of SIM efforts can optimize taxpayer dollars for increased services through maximizing the coordination and collaboration of community service organizations in connection with local courts. Assistance by SIM staff will help communities track data and analyze information that can support grant applications, can expand existing community resources providing residents in crisis more options to meet their needs, and can produce information increasing resident awareness of available services.

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

The Department of Social and Health Services' (DSHS) Research and Data Analysis periodically reports on recidivism and employment outcomes for adult felony drug court participants. However, all therapeutic courts need access to data and information in order to deliver the best possible services and outcomes. Although the DSHS reporting is informative, the intended audience is the Health Care Authority and their partners, not the court-based teams that implement therapeutic courts. AOC leadership has been working with DSHS and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) experts to find ways to enter data sharing agreements with DSHS; this has proven to be unsuccessful thus far. Even if data sharing agreements are feasible, we would only see a piece of the picture, leading to missing information and the inability to provide the most robust to support.

Although the BHP can continue to provide SIM facilitation as we have, there are no other sources to support this work outside of expensive national providers. This also leaves us without the ability to put together a larger statewide look at services and innovative solutions provided in communities across the state. Without the involvement of a trained SIM coordinator in planning, mapping, and follow up, courts and communities are left to their existing resources and communication pathways which slows or limits progress and technical assistance opportunities. This dedicated AOC staff

member would be able to provide these services at little to no cost to the court and community with long term implementation and wrap-in with other AOC services.

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

Without the additional staff, the BHP cannot adequately meet the research needs or SIM mapping events that our court partners have identified.

The limited court-level data for therapeutic courts means that we cannot describe or assess the level of utilization, manner of operations, or effectiveness of therapeutic courts for the state. The intersection of behavioral health and the judicial system has evolved since the BHP was originally planned by AOC and funded by the Legislature in the 2021-23 biennial budget. With the enactment of the *Blake* legislation and the addition of nearly fifty therapeutic courts at the limited jurisdiction level, as well as recovery navigator programs all jurisdictions, the necessity for courts to understand their communities and the associated behavioral health initiatives, issues, and resources has grown immensely.

Without SIM staff, courts and communities can hire organizations like Policy Research Associates (a national behavioral health research and technical assistance firm) for end-to-end mapping services. However, these services are available at a high cost that takes resources away from other investments. Services offered by these firms are outside of Washington, offering less contextual familiarity and lacking wrap-in with technical assistance, education, and other longer-term services provided through AOC's BHP. Without the involvement of a trained facilitator in planning, mapping, and follow up, communities are left to their existing resources and communication pathways which slows or limits progress and technical assistance opportunities. A dedicated AOC SIM staff member would be able to provide these services at little to no cost to the court and community with long term implementation and wrap-in with other AOC services.

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

This request seeks funding for the original, planned BHP research and SIM objectives. At the time, their importance and the statewide demand for these services was underestimated. Providing additional funding will fill the gap.

**Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions:**

**Staffing Assumptions**

*Research Associate.* Beginning July 1, 2025 and ongoing, AOC requires salary, benefits, and associated standard costs for 1.0 FTE Research Associate to build and maintain a back-end data collection system to gather information on therapeutic court entries at all levels of court and across all therapeutic court types.

*Court Program Analyst.* Beginning July 1, 2025 and ongoing, AOC requires salary, benefits, and associated standard costs for 1.0 FTE Court Program Analyst to coordinate all SIM events and create updated Washington-specific material to educate on and coordinate SIM work. The position would also build out a statewide SIM map and coordinate collaborate with partner agencies in SIM part of that team.

**Other Non-Standard Costs**

*Travel.* SIM facilitation requires a higher volume of travel and lodging than most of other positions. We anticipate needing to support the travel cost of three people, six times annually at \$30,000 per year. (Object G)

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<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>
A Salaries and Wages	204,000	204,000	204,000	204,000	204,000	204,000
B Employee Benefits	63,000	63,000	63,000	63,000	63,000	63,000
E Goods and Services	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000	12,000
G Travel	34,000	34,000	34,000	34,000	34,000	34,000
J Capital Outlays	16,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
T Intra-Agency Reimbursements	67,000	67,000	67,000	67,000	67,000	67,000
<b>Total Objects</b>	<b>396,000</b>	<b>384,000</b>	<b>384,000</b>	<b>384,000</b>	<b>384,000</b>	<b>384,000</b>

**Staffing**

<b>Job Class</b>	<b>Salary</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>
COURT PROGRAM ANALYST	98,000	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
RESEARCH ASSOCIATE	98,000	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
<b>Total FTEs</b>		<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>

Explanation of standard costs by object:

A - Salary estimates are current biennium actual rates at Step L.

B - Benefits are the agency average of 31.10% of salaries.

E - Goods and Services are the agency average of \$5,800 per direct program FTE.

G - Travel is the agency average of \$2,000 per direct program FTE.

J – Ongoing Equipment is the agency average of \$1,900 per direct program FTE.

J – One-time IT Equipment is \$5,900 for the first fiscal year per direct program FTE.

Agency Indirect is calculated at a rate of 24.98% of direct program salaries and benefits.

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

**Fair and Effective Administration of Justice**

This work will identify, educate, and build collaboration towards solutions through Washington’s therapeutic courts. It will help provide data to track equity, efficiency, and effectiveness. The SIM Coordinator will help courts and communities identify gaps in resources, which will help therapeutic courts be more effective in providing the services people in their communities need.

**Accessibility**

This work increases understanding of the experience of those with behavioral health disorders in the criminal legal system and will provide opportunities and strategies for education and systems building to make services and courts more accessible to that population.

**Access to Necessary Representation**

Increased research support would allow for innovative studies, such as studying whether those in treatment courts have access to representation and how it may affect outcomes.

**Commitment to Effective Court Management**

Education and increased cross-system collaborations work to reduce recidivism, specifically for those high-utilizers. Data and research are central to effective court management. Education of court staff is also central to effective court management.

**Sufficient Staffing and Support**

The SIM work will help courts identify gaps in services, which helps determine whether courts have sufficient staffing and support for their therapeutic courts.

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

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

Therapeutic court staff would receive education on equitable treatment in therapeutic courts, from entry to graduation. Currently, minority groups are underserved by therapeutic courts across the nation. People of color are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, they are underrepresented in the therapeutic court system. Targeted education on this topic will better equip courts to address it. SIM is unique in that it requires that we bring representation from all members of our community to the table to solicit their feedback and perspective on the system in the community and provide ideas to address issue identified. With skilled facilitation, action items can be identified to increase equitable services across communities.

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

The BHP has been supporting both efforts for two years. During that time, we have administered surveys, connected with courts, behavioral health providers, community members, probation, therapeutic court staff and law enforcement on these topics. The overwhelming response is that they need more of this work across the state.

**Consider which target populations or communities would be disproportionately impacted by this proposal.**

**Explain why and how these equity impacts will be mitigated.**

We do not foresee any negative impact in implementing this work.

**Are there impacts to other governmental entities?**

This work would likely increase collaboration (and therefore time spent) with our partners at the Health Care Authority's Division of Behavioral Health and Rehabilitation as well the Office of Public Defense. These are mutually beneficial relationships that we have already built. For SIM, it does take time and effort from local government officials to engage in the SIM mapping events and any follow-up action items that are identified by the team. Local officials generally see the benefits of the time spent on these projects and most have been eager to engage.

**Stakeholder response:**

Response from our court partners and local and state-level behavioral health partners has been favorable to date. These same groups support our continued expansion of the AOC's SIM services.

**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?**

No

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**Are there information technology impacts?**

No

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