

# PIERCE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT COURTS AND THE MEDIA

PRESENTED BY: JUDGE TIMOTHY ASHCRAFT  
COURT ADMINISTRATOR CHRIS GADDIS

# Experience in Pierce County Superior Court

- ▶ Lifecycle of a Criminal Case
- ▶ High-Profile Civil Cases
- ▶ What or Why Can't We Share
- ▶ Understanding Stakeholders
- ▶ Preparing Courtrooms
- ▶ Legacy Media v. "Independent" and Vloggers
- ▶ How are Media Requests Handled
- ▶ Leveraging Media



# LIFECYCLE OF A CRIMINAL CASE

- ▶ Investigation and Filing
  - ▶ Prosecutor is Responsible for Charging Decisions (Probable Cause Statement)
- ▶ Arraignment
  - ▶ Conditions of Release (P.R., Home Monitoring, Bail, No Bail)
  - ▶ Pretrial Services
  - ▶ In-Custody v. Summons Arraignment
- ▶ Pierce County's CDPJ Docket
  - ▶ Weekly Pending
  - ▶ Cases Over 270+
  - ▶ Omnibus Hearings

# LIFECYCLE OF A CRIMINAL CASE

- ▶ Trial Readiness
  - ▶ Length of Trial, Number of Jurors, Pre-Trial Motions
- ▶ Assignment of Trial
- ▶ Pre-Assignment of High-Profile Trials
  - ▶ Benefit of Pre-Trial Motions
  - ▶ Improved Logistical Support from Court Administration
- ▶ Pleas

# DIFFERENCES IN HPT CIVIL CASES

- ▶ Generally, arise out of larger, separately newsworthy events
  - ▶ Amtrak Accident
  - ▶ Josh Powell Case
  - ▶ E. Coli Outbreaks
- ▶ Unlike criminal cases, these civil cases are pre-assigned at the outset of the case
  - ▶ Judicial Rotation issues
- ▶ Typically involves fewer stakeholders than the high-profile criminal case
- ▶ Settlement

# WHAT OR WHY CAN'T WE SHARE

- ▶ Rules of Judicial Conduct
  - ▶ Rule 1.2 – Promoting Confidence in the Judiciary
    - ▶ A judge shall act at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the independence, integrity and impartiality of the judiciary, and shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety.

# WHAT OR WHY CAN'T WE SHARE

- ▶ Rules of Judicial Conduct
  - ▶ Rule 2.10 – Judicial Statements on Pending Cases
    - ▶ A judge shall not make any public statement that would reasonably be expected to affect the outcome or impair the fairness of a pending matter.
    - ▶ A judge shall not make promises or commitments that are inconsistent with the impartial performance of the adjudicative duties of judicial office.
    - ▶ A judge shall require court staff and others subject to the judge's direction to refrain from making statements that the judge would be prohibited from making.
    - ▶ A judge may make public statements in the course of official duties and may explain court procedures.
- ▶ It might not be our information to share

# UNDERSTANDING STAKEHOLDERS

- ▶ Local v. National interest
- ▶ Are the facts of the case a driving factor v. person involved
- ▶ Who needs to be in the room
- ▶ Can you learn things from other jurisdictions



# PREPARING COURTROOMS

- ▶ Equipment Needed
- ▶ Media Set Up
  - ▶ Pierce County's Rainier Conference Room
- ▶ How large of a courtroom will you need
- ▶ Will you have an overflow room
- ▶ Remote options
  - ▶ Chilling effect on jurors during voir dire

# LEGACY MEDIA V. “INDEPENDENT” AND VLOGGERS

- ▶ General Rule 16
- ▶ Media Orders
  - ▶ Interview Locations
- ▶ Who in Your Jurisdiction Can Help
- ▶ Media Tours

# HOW ARE MEDIA REQUESTS HANDLED

- ▶ Who is Your Primary Media Contact
  - ▶ Do they have the authority to speak on behalf of the court
- ▶ Do you Have a Backup for your Backup
- ▶ On Camera Interviews v. Written Responses
- ▶ Timelines of Requests
- ▶ Dealing with Inaccuracies

# LEVERAGING MEDIA

- ▶ What is the story that you are trying to share
- ▶ Can the media assist you in educating the public (Community Outreach)

# Summary

If your jurisdiction is going to be hosting a high-profile trial, with local and national attention, please consider reaching out to media to discuss how they are wanting to cover the trial. Meet early and often to answer questions so coverage by the media can be as accurate as possible.



# THANK YOU

Connect with us.



Superior Court Administrator Chris Gaddis  
[chris.gaddis@piercecountywa.gov](mailto:chris.gaddis@piercecountywa.gov)