

Court Funding in Washington State

Did you know?

- Washington's judicial branch is comprised of four levels of court:

Supreme Court

Court of Appeals

Superior courts

Courts of Limited Jurisdiction (district and municipal courts)

The Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals (referred to as appellate courts) hear appeals from the superior, district and municipal courts (referred to as trial courts).

- State funding of the judicial branch accounts for less than three-tenths of one percent of the total operating budget of Washington State.¹

Included in this percentage is the full operating budgets for the Washington Supreme Court, its administrative departments, the Court of Appeals and half of the salaries of superior court judges statewide. In superior courts, in addition to half of all judicial salaries, juvenile departments receive approximately 35 percent of their funding from the state's Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration.²

- All additional costs of operating the trial courts are borne by the state's 39 counties and numerous cities. District courts are funded exclusively by the counties. Municipal courts are funded exclusively by cities.
- Together, counties and cities support approximately 90 percent of the cost of the state's judicial system.³
- While criminal justice costs (costs for jails, prosecution, courts, public defense, and law enforcement) account for an average of 70 percent of county budgets, the amount dedicated to the trial courts seldom totals more than six percent of a local city or county budget.
- Filing fees, infraction penalties and statutory assessments, which are shared by local and state government, constituted nearly \$176 million dollars in 2002. Of that amount, nearly \$66 million was forwarded by the state's trial courts to the state Public Safety and Education Account.⁴
- According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington State ranks 50th in state government contribution to funding judicial and legal

¹ Source: 2001-03 Washington State Omnibus Operating Budget, Total Budgeted Funds

² Source: AOC analysis of JRA Budget

³ Source: Washington State Auditor's Office

⁴ Source: State Treasurer's Office FY 02 data and 2001 data derived from AOC remittance reports

services.⁵ The total cost of Washington's trial courts, including indigent defense, is \$428 million per year of which 10.6 percent is funded by the state.

- While the state percentage of funding is limited, state actions and policies directly affect the operation of the trial courts. For example:
 - In 2002, the Washington State Patrol was responsible for 88 percent of DUI charges and 70 percent of traffic infraction charges filed in Washington State District Courts (figures reflect state and county filings only).
 - Many state agencies such as the Attorney General, the Department of Social and Health Services, Department of Ecology and others use the trial courts to file both criminal and civil litigation.
 - The number of judges and their salaries are established by the state
 - Statutory changes in criminal sentencing, DUI sanctions, juvenile dependency and other social policy areas are regularly enacted by the Legislature, and impact the courts' workload and operation.

To learn more about court funding in Washington State, visit the Washington State Court Funding Task Force at
http://www.courts.wa.gov/programs_orgs/pos_bja/?fa=pos_bja.funding

⁵ Source: State & Local Government Burden of Total Direct Expenditure on Judicial & Legal Services, Fiscal Year 1999, Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice.