

BOARD FOR JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION

Court Security Task Force

# **Court Security Funding Request 2023 - Talking Points**

These talking points are intended for use in your conversations with legislators and stakeholders. Please do not forward to recipients in lieu of a conversation. If you want to send a letter, please go to the [Legislative Communications Toolkit](https://www.courts.wa.gov/programs_orgs/pos_bja/?fa=pos_bja.taskforcematerials)  and download a sample letter that you can customize.

**Establish the Rural and Small Court Security Matching Grant Program**

The judicial branch is requesting $2.5 million annually to create a matching grant program to serve small and rural courthouses in economically distressed jurisdictions. This program includes a local government cost sharing component.

State funding will cover between 50 - 90% of the costs for security equipment and staffing, with local governments contributing 10 - 50%. Courts located in the neediest jurisdictions contribute the lowest percentage of the cost.

Factors used to determine the economic health of a jurisdiction are: poverty rates, median income and revenue.

For instance, a courthouse located in a county with a low revenue base, low median income and high poverty rate, will contribute 10% of the total cost.

1. We know legislators share our concern for everyone to feel safe in our public buildings. This funding request will give courts and their local funding entities the financial support that they need to make these types of critical security upgrades:

* Hire private court security officers to keep people safe and prevent security incidents

Contract for onsite and on demand security training for all courthouse employees

Purchase entry screening equipment and construct entry screening stations

Purchase and install security cameras and duress alarm systems

**Prevention and Response: The need for court security officers and security equipment**

1. Rural courts are especially vulnerable in the case of a serious security incident. Even if they are housed with law enforcement, responding officers are often patrolling other parts of the jurisdiction. Reliable duress alarms and emergency broadcast systems are critically needed for these courts.
2. Court security officers and entry screeners are vital tools to keep weapons out of the court, de-escalate disruptions, and remove dangerous people from the courtroom. All courts in Washington, regardless of rural or urban location, handle cases that have significant effect on people’s lives and evoke emotional responses that can create safety risks and the need for court security staff.
3. Courthouse security equipment is essential to prevent and respond to security incidents. There are approximately 100 courthouses in the state that have either outdated or no security equipment.
   * Security cameras and duress and broadcast alarm systems are necessary in order to react quickly to security emergencies.
   * Weapons screening with magnetometers, wands, and x-ray machines will keep dangerous items from making it into the courthouse.
4. Security audits form the foundation of a good security plan and are recommended every three years. Over 75% of courts do not meet this recommendation, with many never having had an audit. This funding will provide courts with experienced security experts to assess security risks, advise on steps to resolve critical vulnerabilities, and prioritize security improvements.
5. Courthouse personnel need access to active shooter and de-escalation training. Funding will provide resources to provide training for judicial officers and members of the court community in order to prevent or react safely to security incidents and acts of violence.

**Security Incidents and Increasing Threats**

1. One hundred seventeen victim advocates surveyed in 2020 said they are concerned for their safety and the safety of their clients in courthouses across the state. Over 60% of advocates have experienced one or more security incidents that range from harassment and threats to physical assaults on courthouse premises. Over 75% of advocates said that their client expressed concerns about personal safety in the courthouse.
2. Even though courts were either closed or open on a limited basis, courts are reporting more serious threats and disturbances in the courtroom over the past two years. The 546 incidents reported since the beginning of 2020 continue the upward trend in all security incidents that have been reported to the Administrative Office of the Courts since 2013.
3. The Department of Homeland Security continues to publish national terrorism bulletins warning of the heightened threat of violent extremism and potential attacks. Additionally, The U.S. Marshals have indicated for years that they expect continued increases in threats to judges. As courthouses are a symbol of justice and the hub of civic activities, the need to fortify the security of these buildings has never been greater. Now is the time to provide the resources so that all courts meet the minimum security standards to protect all who enter courthouses in Washington State.