



**King County**

District Court  
Office of the Chief Presiding Judge  
W1034 King County Courthouse  
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**The Honorable Barbara Linde**  
Chief Presiding Judge

**Tricia Crozier**  
Chief Administrative Officer

June 1, 2009

The Honorable Kurt Triplett  
King County Executive  
401 5th Avenue, Suite 800  
Seattle, Washington 98104

Ms. Beth Goldberg  
Acting Budget Director  
401 5th Avenue, Suite 810  
Seattle, Washington 98104

Dear Executive Triplett and Acting Budget Director Goldberg,

It is my privilege to present the King County District Court's budget proposal for 2010. In the face of reductions amounting to almost 10% in 2009, and facing more budget challenges ahead, I am very proud that District Court continues to serve the citizens of King County, and to maintain programs critical to social equity and justice. It is our goal to weather this economic storm without dismantling the lean, efficient and innovative District Court, and its three discretionary programs: Probation Services, Mental Health Court, and the Relicensing Program. Moreover, it is our goal to be ready for the new caseload coming our way. We need your help.

The recent cuts to our understaffed Court resulted in the loss of staff positions across our system, from court clerks and probation officers, to management and the Deputy CAO. In addition to losing critical staff positions, we also agreed to place roughly 80% of our staff on unpaid furlough status for 10 days in 2009, while still meeting our legal mandate under RCW 3.30.040 to keep District Court "always open" to the public. To make matters worse, the Prosecutor's revised filing standards significantly increased Expedited Felony filings in District Court. The Prosecutor's filings standards created budget savings elsewhere but increased the caseload burden on District Court.

## King County District Court 2010 Budget Request

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This 2010 District Court budget proposal seeks to maintain the adjusted status quo budget with several critically important additions. We are seeking to add two judicial officers as authorized by the 2009 State legislature. We are also seeking to add a Project Manager for the new Tolling Infraction work that will arrive at year end.

As we struggle to meet legal mandates under State and Federal Constitutions, State law, and Interlocal Agreements with 13 cities, we are facing increasing workloads. On July 18, the new Sound Transit system will begin operating and will utilize a new Transit Police entity that will file all misdemeanor and infraction offenses relating to Sound Transit, into King County District Court. In addition, District Court will see infractions increase by the thousands due to Photo Enforcement programs newly underway in Bellevue and Burien. Late in 2010 early tolling will begin on the 520 bridge and as a result, District Court will face an unprecedented influx of infractions that will likely result in more than a ten-fold increase in caseload in 2011. Unfortunately, this new, huge caseload will not ramp up gradually. Rather, it is anticipated the Court will need to be ready to process an estimated 6,250 new cases on day one and each day thereafter.

The District Court's present situation is tenuous. A 2007 staff needs assessment, conducted by the National Center for State Courts, identified that District Court is understaffed by 57 FTEs. Although District Court received funding between November 2007 and January 2008 for 21 of those 57 positions, the cuts taken for 2009 eliminated all of the funds for those positions and more.

District Court has only three discretionary programs: Probation, Mental Health Court and Relicensing. *The Budget Office's target reduction for 2010 equates to the wholesale elimination of Probation Services.* If budget cuts force the elimination of Probation Services, repeat Drunk Drivers and Domestic Violence offenders will go without supervision. Obviously, increased recidivism will be the likely result, threatening public safety and further burdening jails and courts.

Our Mental Health Court just celebrated its tenth anniversary. It has been an award winning effort that the entire County is very proud of, successfully guiding mentally ill offenders into treatment, and lowering the risk of re-offense along the way. Other courts throughout the United States and Canada have studied and copied our program. In addition, efforts are underway, in cooperation with Prosecuting Attorney Dan Satterberg, to make Mental Health Court accessible to every city in King County that is currently without access to Mental Health Court.

Our Court's Relicensing Program diverts otherwise criminal misdemeanor driver's license offenses out of the system. It requires the commitment of court resources at a very high level yet, because of this commitment of resources approximately 4,500 Driving While License Suspended cases *did not get filed* last year. As a result, there were 4,500 fewer public defender appointments and thousands of jail days and other resources saved in other King County general fund dependant entities.

Elimination of any of the Court's three discretionary programs, Probation, Mental Health Court or Relicensing, will increase costs to the system, both in the short and long term, making this prospect not only unpalatable, but counterproductive to the desired ends of budget savings.

## King County District Court 2010 Budget Request

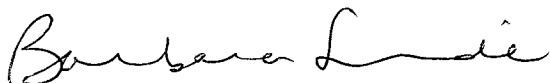
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In Olympia this year, District Court joined with King County and the State Board for Judicial Administration, in efforts to create solutions. I am pleased that some of those efforts were successful, and that the District Court will soon be able to charge a fee for clerical services that previously were only allowed in Superior Courts. I am also grateful that legislative efforts regarding "supplanting" have likely resulted in helping to preserve our therapeutic Mental Health Court.

While the District Court will continue to work hard to find creative solutions and to be a part of the solution, we cannot allow budget reductions to effectively dismantle the King County District Court. I hope that by this letter, I have conveyed the reasons that we will not only be unable to propose cuts to District Court in alignment with the proposed target reduction, we are in need of additional resources to meet new demands.

I look forward to working together to address our common interests in these challenging times.

Respectfully,



Barbara Linde  
Chief Presiding Judge  
King County District Court

cc: Councilmember Dow Constantine  
Councilmember Reagan Dunn  
Councilmember Bob Ferguson  
Councilmember Larry Gossett  
Councilmember Jane Hague  
Councilmember Kathy Lambert  
Councilmember Julia Patterson  
Councilmember Larry Phillips  
Councilmember Peter von Reichbauer  
The Honorable Bruce Hilyer, King County Superior Court Presiding Judge  
The Honorable Sue Rahr, King County Sheriff  
The Honorable Dan Satterberg, King County Prosecuting Attorney  
King County District Court Judges  
King County District Court Leadership Team