

Superior Court of the State of Washington for the County of King

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To: Protocol Committee Members

From: Technical Committee Members

RE: Technical Committee Recommendations to the Protocol Committee

Date: Nov. 4, 2024

Linda Ridge, Chief Administrative Officer of King County Superior Court, convened members of the Technical Committee on Oct. 28, 2024. The meeting included Stephanie Cirkovich, Chief of Staff, King County Council; Melissa Bailey, Principal Legislative Analyst, King County Council; Elly Slakie, Executive Analyst-Budget, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget; Catherine Cornwall, Director, Department of Judicial Administration; and Dr. Shiquan Liao, Program Manager/Statistician, Department of Judicial Administration.

The Technical Committee met and reviewed the 2024 Third Quarter Technical Committee Report. The report consists of three indicators. The Committee noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had a fairly dramatic influence on the judicial system, and continues to affect the indicators in the report.

The first indicator is the Weighted Caseload Index of Pending Cases. This index indicates that the court is in need of additional judicial officers in the King County Superior Court. Looking at only this indicator would suggest that the Court could need five additional judicial officers; however, as mentioned earlier, the pandemic affected pending cases – and in particular, criminal cases.

The second indicator is the median age for all pending case types and for major case types. While the median age for all case types is comparable to pre-pandemic levels, the median age for criminal cases is about double compared to pre-pandemic levels. In addition, there are more serious criminal cases in the court's pending criminal caseload than there were before the pandemic: 209 vs. 114 homicide cases and 498 vs. 364 sex crime cases at the end of September 2024 and December 2018, respectively.

The third indicator is average daily use of pro tem judges and commissioners. The committee discussed this indicator and concluded that it is not a good indicator of judicial workload. Use of pro tem officers is driven by the need to staff calendars that are heard by commissioners, not judges.

The committee also reviewed data related to Civil Protection Order and Unlawful Detainer filings.

- Civil Protection Orders are 38% higher than pre-pandemic levels. Pre-pandemic, there were an average of 329 cases filed per month. For 2024 YTD (through September), the monthly average is 454 cases a month.
- Unlawful Detainer filings are 65% higher than pre-pandemic levels. Pre-pandemic, there were an average of 385 cases a month. For 2024 YTD (through September), the monthly average is 636 cases a month.

It should be noted that Unlawful Detainer cases can only be heard by constitutional commissioners (currently capped at 3 in King County) and judges.

Based on the review of the 2024 Third Quarter Technical Committee Report as well as data for Civil Protection Orders and Unlawful Detainers, the Technical Committee recommends that two judicial officers be added to the King County Superior Court bench.