



## Legislation Text

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Clerk 04/14/2005

AN ORDINANCE approving the District Court Operational Master Plan and adopting policies related to district court operations; and amending Ordinance 8935, Section 3, as amended, and K.C.C. 2.68.005.

### STATEMENT OF FACTS:

1. The district court is the county's court of limited jurisdiction and is the largest court of limited jurisdiction in the state.
2. The court has responsibility for traffic infractions, certain civil matters, and misdemeanor criminal offenses in the county's unincorporated areas and in cities that contract with the court. The court also has responsibility for the adjudication of "state" offenses which include those violations of state statute that occur within the county or when the arresting agency is the Washington State Patrol.
3. The requirements and structure of the district court are contained in state statute, county code, and are also governed by court rules. State law empowers the local county legislative authority with significant flexibility in the development of the court's jurisdictional structure.
4. K.C.C. 4.04.200 establishes the processes for operational and facilities master planning efforts that include current and future workload assumptions.
5. Ordinance 8935 (K.C.C. 2.68.060), adopted in 1989, established a single, unified, county-wide district court. The establishing ordinance requires that the county utilize existing court facilities as satellites, while at the same time supporting the concept of local filing and handling

of cases, in order to provide for a more equitable and cost-effective system of justice for the citizens of King County. It further recognized its function to serve municipal courts and the continuation of contract municipal courts.

6. Ordinance 11578, adopted in 1994, established the policy for the regional provision of district court services through an operational master plan pursuant to K.C.C. 4.04.200.

7. Ordinance 12926, adopted in 1997, established the county's mental health court within the district court. In addition, this ordinance established as policy the intent that the district court begin implementing efficiencies to reduce jail utilization, including efforts to relicense Driving With License Suspended 3rd degree ("DWLS3") offenders.

8. Ordinance 13678, adopted in 1998, specifically stated that it is the policy of the county to maintain the mental health court program within the district court.

9. Ordinance 14265, adopted in 2000, the council set several policies for the district court, including requiring the court to reduce its utilization of secure detention, identify system and operational efficiencies and increase court revenues. In addition, the council repeated its policy direction for the implementation of relicensing programs.

10. Ordinance 14374, adopted in 2002, reduced the number of court divisions in order to allow for court operational efficiencies and included policy guidance related to the implementation of any court operational efficiencies resulting from the redistricting.

11. Ordinance 14430, adopted in 2002, gave the council's approval to the Adult Justice Operational Master Plan, establishing county policies for the use of secure detention capacity and emphasizing system and process efficiencies for both the superior and district courts that would reduce the utilization of jail and reduce overall criminal justice expenditures.

12. A previous District Court Operational Master Plan was completed in 1995, and amended in 1997, prior to the significant policy and operational changes within the county's criminal justice

system and the court itself.

13. Ordinance 14797 the council required that the executive and District Court develop an updated and comprehensive operational master plan.

14. The planning effort was directed by an oversight committee made up of representatives of the county executive, district court, council, and cities that contract with the district court for services.

15. The recommendations of the oversight committee resulted from the work of consultants from the National Center for State Court and staff from the executive, district court and other stakeholders, consulted as appropriate.

16. As required in K.C.C. 4.04.200, the King County executive has approved the District Court Operational Master Plan and has transmitted it to the council for its review and action.

17. Plans submitted for approval under K.C.C. 4.04.200 are generally followed by subsequent planning documents for the development of capital improvements. Each of these plans would also be subject to council approval. The operational master plan is submitted as Attachment A to this ordinance.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

SECTION 1. In accordance with K.C.C. 4.04.210, the District Court Operational Master Plan, Attachment A to this ordinance, dated April 2005, is hereby approved.

NEW SECTION. SECTION 2. Ordinance 8965, Section 3, as amended, and K.C.C. 2.68.005 are each hereby amended to read as follows:

**Purpose and intent.**

A. The King County council finds that a unified, countywide district court, utilizing existing court facilities as satellites, while at the same time supporting the concept of local filing and handling of cases, would provide for a more equitable and cost-effective system of justice for the citizens of King County. ~~((It further~~

~~recognizes its function to serve municipal courts and the continuation of contract municipal courts within the district court facilities where occurring, located as close to the municipality as possible.))~~ It is the intent of council to establish such a unified district court system.

B. The council has received the districting committee report dated September 28, 1988, which unanimously recommended to the council the concept of a unified single district court. The council finds that the interest and welfare of the public would be best served by a unified single district court. This would provide the best institutional setting for district courts. While recognizing and respecting the constitutional separation of power, the council would encourage the court to continue moving forward, under the administrative authority of a strong presiding judge, to achieve and enhance equity in policies, uniform court rules, forms and administrative procedures, standard personnel classification and procedures, flexibility for judicial assignments in order to balance the workload of the various satellite facilities, and achieve overall cost savings where found appropriate through centralization and consolidation of facilities, personnel and case assignments.

C. While the council recognizes the importance of meeting the needs of all citizens it serves in the region, it also recognizes the need to operate in a cost-effective manner in order to address continuing current expense deficits. The council supports the provision of district court services throughout the county, but also expects that county agencies, including the district court, provides services in the most cost-effective way. As a consequence, the council is amending the county district court plan for 2003 to reduce the number of court divisions and provide for greater flexibility in the court's allocation of resources and facilities.

D. As a result of the 2004-05 planning effort, the councils further reaffirms that it is county policy that to retain for the long term the aspiration to be the court of choice for court of limited jurisdiction in the county, focusing its energy and resources on improving operations and services balancing the needs of citizens, the court, the county and the cities. The council finds that the district court should develop and apply quality service standards and measures for its operations. The council also finds that the county shall:

1. Continue to support problem-solving courts, improving access to problem-solving courts and incorporating problem-solving courts in the district court's planning process;
2. Continue and make explicit the strategy of improving efficiency through unification of governance, administration and planning, centralizing workload where appropriate;
3. Continue to develop and implement technological improvements to support the district court operations in order to increase access to court services and information;
4. Continue to support the district court's function to serve cities through contracts and support flexibility in providing services and facilities for district court customers;
5. Continue to support a unified, countywide district court, using existing facilities, to provide for a more equitable and cost-effective system of justice for the citizens of King County:
  - a. ensuring court facilities promote system efficiencies, quality services and access to justice;
  - b. consolidating district court facilities that exist in the same city,
  - c. reconsidering facilities if there are changes with contracting cities or changes in leases; and
6. Work together with stakeholders to gain cooperation and assistance to meet the needs of the judicial system at the state and local levels.

SECTION 3. The executive, in conjunction with the district court and court stakeholders, will submit for council approval by ordinance a facilities master plan by April 1, 2006. The proposed facilities plan and ordinance must be filed in the form of sixteen copies with the clerk of the council, who will retain the original and will forward

copies to each councilmember and to the lead staff of the budget and fiscal management and the law, justice and human services committees or their successors.