

# Seattle Municipal Court

The Honorable Faye R. Chess, Presiding Judge

(206) 684-5600

<http://www.seattle.gov/courts/>

## Department Overview

As the judicial branch of Seattle City government, the Seattle Municipal Court (SMC or Court) provides a forum to resolve alleged violations of the law in a respectful, independent, and impartial manner. SMC adjudicates misdemeanors, gross misdemeanors, infractions (e.g., traffic and parking tickets, traffic camera violations, and other violations), and civil violations related to building and zoning offenses. The Court has seven elected judges and five appointed magistrates. There are more cases processed here than any other municipal court in the State of Washington.

This is a transformational time at SMC with several change initiatives underway that will advance SMC as the people's court, providing fair, equitable and innovative delivery of justice. Each change initiative aligns with the Court's strategic priorities of:

- building capacity
- evolving services to center those served
- modeling a culture rooted in equity
- streamlining decision making
- engaging staff to develop future leaders today

In 2024, SMC completed realignment its organizational structure into four service areas: Operations, Administrative Services, Court Technology, and Strategy. This structure supports realizing SMC's strategic priorities by making the best use of court resources, eliminating siloed operations and functions, and ensuring court services are easy to navigate. The realignment improves transparency in decision-making and communication throughout the Court. In late 2023, SMC judges unanimously approved a sustainable governance structure memorialized in a governance playbook that outlines the operating agreements of the court, establishes the process by which these agreements may be changed, and documents decision-making authority. This was developed in partnership with the National Center for State Courts. In 2024, the court launched a project governance structure to ensure a clear and consistent process for requesting, submitting, vetting, and approving projects and system enhancements to ensure alignment with court policy and strategy.

SMC recognizes undoing institutional racism and ensuring a culture of equity and inclusion requires engagement with community and staff to identify meaningful solutions. In 2024, SMC continued to engage community through its judicial officers, as well as through Community Relief events. These events bring court services and resources to Seattle neighborhoods and are an opportunity for community members to receive assistance with resolving SMC warrants, learn about options for addressing tickets, help with reinstating their driver's license, and access supportive services through the Community Resource Center. In May 2024, SMC hosted its first Law Day event, welcoming over 40 high school students to the court to learn about the branches of City government, explore court careers, and participate in mock trials.

The Court successfully launched its new technology systems in March 2024, the culmination of a multi-year project to replace a 30+ year-old legacy municipal court information system, MCIS. User stories and human-centered design informed the business transformation. The court continues to implement components of the system deferred to ensure an on-schedule launch as well as key data exchanges with system partners.

Ensuring access to justice for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind (D/HH/DV) individuals remains a priority for the Court. SMC has provided Interpreter Services in 149 languages since 2005, including American Sign Language. Free interpreter services are provided for criminal and civil matters, including

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court hearings, trials, attorney-client interviews, probation appointments, prosecution witnesses, mental health evaluations, customer service, and translation of court forms and letters.

SMC looks forward to the strategic changes planned for the next year that will advance the court values of service, fairness, equity and inclusion, innovation, excellence, and integrity.

### Budget Snapshot

	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
<b>Department Support</b>				
General Fund Support	41,585,499	43,279,980	45,891,310	48,085,609
Other Funding - Operating	-	-	335,602	396,602
<b>Total Operations</b>	<b>41,585,499</b>	<b>43,279,980</b>	<b>46,226,911</b>	<b>48,482,211</b>
<b>Total Appropriations</b>	<b>41,585,499</b>	<b>43,279,980</b>	<b>46,226,911</b>	<b>48,482,211</b>
Full-Time Equivalents Total*	201.85	201.85	200.85	200.85

\* FTE totals are provided for informational purposes only. Changes in FTEs resulting from City Council or Human Resources Director actions outside of the budget process may not be detailed here

### Budget Overview

The City's 2025 – 2026 Proposed Budget maintains core services for the Seattle Municipal Court. The department will continue to invest in programs to adjudicate misdemeanors, gross misdemeanors, infractions (e.g., traffic and parking tickets, traffic camera violations, and other violations), and civil violations related to building and zoning offenses.

The General Fund revenue forecast for the City's 2025 – 2026 Proposed Budget are insufficient to cover expected costs. General Fund reductions were identified to mitigate this shortfall in revenues. The Court provides a 0.7% reduction of \$361,203 including 3.0 FTE Administrative Specialist positions.

The Court realigned its organizational structure in 2024 into four areas of Operations, Administrative Services, Court Technology and Strategy, as summarized in the Department Overview. Through net-zero budget changes, all labor and non-labor appropriations are moved from the Court Compliance Budget Summary Level (BSL) into the Court Operations and Administrations BSL's.

The budget is also adjusted for minor Citywide and departmental technical changes which include support for maintaining the new case management system, one-time support for organizational realignment with the new software, and ongoing grant funding to sustain a staff member for therapeutic courts.

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## Incremental Budget Changes

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	Dollars	FTE
<b>2024 Adopted Budget</b>	<b>43,279,980</b>	<b>201.85</b>
<b>Baseline</b>		
Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	(1,038,964)	-
Bargained Annual Wage and Market Wage Increases to Base Budget	4,114,563	-
<b>Proposed Operating</b>		
Customer Service Staff Reduction	(361,203)	(3.00)
Grant Backed Funding for Therapeutic Court Position	-	1.00
Case Management Software Contract	246,351	-
Therapeutic Court Grant	165,000	-
School Zone Camera Expansion	125,000	1.00
Trial Court Improvement Account Funding to Support Organizational Realignment	104,222	-
Parking Fine Increase	-	-
<b>Proposed Technical</b>		
Final Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	(707,834)	-
Bargained Annual Wage and Market Wage Increases to Base Budget – Local 77	260,125	-
Judicial Salary Technical Adjustment	39,671	-
<b>Total Incremental Changes</b>	<b>\$2,946,931</b>	<b>(1.00)</b>
<b>Total 2025 Proposed Budget</b>	<b>\$46,226,911</b>	<b>200.85</b>

## Description of Incremental Budget Changes

### Baseline

#### Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes

Expenditures \$(1,038,964)

Citywide technical adjustments made in the baseline phase reflect changes to internal services costs, including rates from the Department of Finance & Administrative Services, Seattle Information Technology Department, Seattle Department of Human Resources, and for healthcare, retirement, and industrial insurance charges for the department. These adjustments reflect initial assumptions about these costs and inflators early in the budget process.

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## **Bargained Annual Wage and Market Wage Increases to Base Budget**

Expenditures \$4,114,563

This centrally administered change adjusts appropriations to reflect the Annual Wage Increases and Market Adjustments, as outlined in the agreements between the City and the Coalition of Unions or other standalone Unions, for personnel costs included in this department's baseline budget. This includes increases to salary, FICA, Medicare, retirement, overtime and temporary labor.

## **Proposed Operating**

### **Customer Service Staff Reduction**

Expenditures \$(361,203)

Position Allocation (3.00)

The General Fund revenue forecast is insufficient to cover expected costs. General Fund reductions were identified to mitigate this shortfall in revenues. This eliminates three vacant Administrative Specialist II positions in the Court Operations division. At this time, existing court staff are able to absorb this work.

### **Grant Backed Funding for Therapeutic Court Position**

Position Allocation 1.00

The Washington State Administrative Office of the Court (AOC) has ongoing, permanent funding available for courts of limited jurisdiction for Therapeutic Courts. The Court is a member of the group that will be receiving annual distributions. This change request makes permanent the Mental Health Court Community Support Specialist, who connects clients with mental health and/or substance use disorder to services and get them the support they need as they address their court obligations.

### **Case Management Software Contract**

Expenditures \$246,351

This item increases appropriation for the ongoing Operating and Maintenance costs of the new case management system including mandated annual upgrades. The Court retired its legacy case management system in 2024. The new case management system (MCIS 2.0/C-Track) will need ongoing upgrades to keep the system current and able to interact with other enterprise systems.

### **Therapeutic Court Grant**

Expenditures \$165,000

Revenues \$165,000

This is grant funding from the Washington State Administrative Office of the Court for the new grant starting in July of 2025. This grant will continue to support a 1.0 FTE Strategic Advisor I, a nonprofit service provider contract, supplies, training and seminar travel, and recovery support costs. It serves Seattle Municipal Court participants identified with substance use disorders or other behavioral health needs and engages individuals with community-based therapeutic interventions. There are no matching requirements.

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## School Zone Camera Expansion

Expenditures	\$125,000
Position Allocation	1.00

The School Zone Camera program is a joint program between the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Police Department (SPD), and SMC that installs and operates automated enforcement cameras and processes citations for 30 cameras intended to enforce speed limits in school zones at 19 camera locations at 18 schools.

This item expands the program, installing 37 new cameras at 18 additional locations, intending to be operational by fall 2025. This expansion will nearly double the total number of existing locations that have automated school zone camera enforcement. Revenue from ticket payments will be used to offset operating and citation processing costs in SDOT, SPD, and SMC, and support fund balance in the School Safety Traffic and Pedestrian Improvement (SSTPI) Fund to help prevent the need for future reductions to school safety and pedestrian improvement projects. The budget changes for SPD and SDOT operating, and citation processing costs associated with this expansion are included in their respective Budget Book sections. Please see these sections for more information about these impacts.

## Trial Court Improvement Account Funding to Support Organizational Realignment

Expenditures	\$104,222
Position Allocation	-

This change request reduces the Trial Court Improvement Account (TCIA) fund balance and allocates one-time resources to SMC to advance their organization transformation in support of the new case management system and extending a sunset position initiated in 2024. The court is changing the organization and internal administrative systems to support the new case management system.

## Parking Fine Increase

Revenues	\$4,900,000
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Under their authority granted by State law, Seattle Municipal Court judges have increased fines for parking citations, to take effect January 1, 2025. These fine amounts have not changed since 2011. The changes align these fines with inflation and approach parity with similar U.S. cities. In total, this change will add an estimated \$4.9 million in General Fund revenues from parking citations. The increase is roughly 50% across the board where fines of \$29 will increase to \$43; fines of \$44 will increase to \$65; fines of \$47 will increase to \$69; fines of \$53 will increase to \$78.

## Proposed Technical

### Final Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes

Expenditures	\$(707,834)
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Citywide technical adjustments made in the proposed phase reflect changes to internal services costs, including rates from the Department of Finance & Administrative Services, Seattle Information Technology Department, Seattle Department of Human Resources, and for healthcare for the department. These adjustments reflect final decisions about these costs made during the Proposed Phase of the budget process.

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## **Bargained Annual Wage and Market Wage Increases to Base Budget – Local 77**

Expenditures \$260,125

This centrally administered change adjusts appropriations to reflect the Annual Wage Increases and Market Adjustments, as outlined in the agreements between the City and Local 77 bargaining units, for personnel costs included in this department’s budget. This includes increases to salary, FICA, Medicare, retirement, overtime and temporary labor.

## **Judicial Salary Technical Adjustment**

Expenditures \$39,671

Washington State elected judicial salaries are set by Washington Citizens’ on Salaries for Elected Officials. As directed in Ordinance 122112, SMC judicial salaries are set at 95% of the district court. A salary schedule has been set and a wage increase was mandated for increase effective July 1, 2024. Setting SMC judicial salaries at this level qualifies the city to receive a contribution from the state for one-time improvements. The state’s contribution is generally \$150,000 annually and is applied to the Trial Court Improvement Account in Finance General. Ordinance 122112 permits appropriation by annual budget or by separate ordinance, solely to fund allowable SMC related expenditures.

## **Consolidation of Half-time to Full-time Positions**

Position Allocation -

As part of the Court reorganization prompted by case management system changes, SMC is consolidating eight part-time positions into four full-time FTE. This is a net-zero cleanup change. SMC has filled these as full-time positions using the other 0.5 FTE salary savings to fund a 1.0 FTE. Truing up the positions will provide a more accurate view of open/vacant positions.

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## Expenditure Overview

	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
<b>Appropriations</b>				
<b>SMC - BO-MC-2000 - Court Operations</b>				
00100 - General Fund	17,735,127	17,683,258	23,326,785	24,552,105
18500 - School Safety Traffic and Pedestrian Improvement Fund	-	-	280,602	366,602
<b>Total for BSL: BO-MC-2000</b>	<b>17,735,127</b>	<b>17,683,258</b>	<b>23,607,387</b>	<b>24,918,707</b>
<b>SMC - BO-MC-3000 - Administration</b>				
00100 - General Fund	18,801,726	20,689,882	22,564,525	23,533,505
18500 - School Safety Traffic and Pedestrian Improvement Fund	-	-	55,000	30,000
<b>Total for BSL: BO-MC-3000</b>	<b>18,801,726</b>	<b>20,689,882</b>	<b>22,619,525</b>	<b>23,563,505</b>
<b>SMC - BO-MC-4000 - Court Compliance</b>				
00100 - General Fund	5,048,645	4,906,840		
<b>Total for BSL: BO-MC-4000</b>	<b>5,048,645</b>	<b>4,906,840</b>		
<b>Department Total</b>	<b>41,585,499</b>	<b>43,279,980</b>	<b>46,226,911</b>	<b>48,482,211</b>
<b>Department Full-Time Equivalents Total*</b>	<b>201.85</b>	<b>201.85</b>	<b>200.85</b>	<b>200.85</b>

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## Budget Summary by Fund Seattle Municipal Court

	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
00100 - General Fund	41,585,499	43,279,980	45,891,310	48,085,609
18500 - School Safety Traffic and Pedestrian Improvement Fund	-	-	125,000	186,000
<b>Budget Totals for SMC</b>	<b>41,585,499</b>	<b>43,279,980</b>	<b>46,226,911</b>	<b>48,482,211</b>

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## Revenue Overview

### 2025 Estimated Revenues

Account Code	Account Name	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
334010	State Grants	309,602	-	165,000	330,000
335060	Judicial Salary Contrib-State	150,026	150,000	150,000	150,000
342040	Detention/Correction Fees	-	-	-	-
342050	Adult Probation & Parole Svcs	1,868	-	-	-
350010	Traffic Infractn Penal, Non-Pa	338,203	300,000	330,000	330,000
350020	Fines/Forfeits-Non-Pkg Infract	60,842	94,000	60,000	60,000
350030	Parking Infraction Penalties	22,394,549	17,179,302	23,789,243	23,836,818
350040	Driving While Intoxicated Pena	35,149	40,000	20,000	20,000
350050	Other Criminal Traffic Penalti	8,246	35,000	30,000	30,000
350060	Time Payments	7,582	14,000	20,000	20,000
350070	Other Non-Traffic Misdemeanor	80,405	120,000	20,000	20,000
350090	City Litigation Recoveries	26,978	65,000	35,000	35,000
350100	Warrant Fee Rev	-	100	-	-
350170	Penalties On Deliquent Recs	395,040	-	-	-
350180	Misc Fines & Penalties	8,082	10,000	5,000	5,000
350190	Nsf Check Fees	1,218	1,000	1,000	1,000
360220	Interest Earned On Deliquent A	103,137	-	-	-
360540	Cashiers Overages & Shortages	2,256	1,050	1,050	1,050
<b>Total Revenues for: 00100 - General Fund</b>		<b>23,923,184</b>	<b>18,009,452</b>	<b>24,626,293</b>	<b>24,838,868</b>
<b>Total SMC Resources</b>		<b>23,923,184</b>	<b>18,009,452</b>	<b>24,626,293</b>	<b>24,838,868</b>

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## Appropriations by Budget Summary Level and Program

### **SMC - BO-MC-2000 - Court Operations**

The purpose of the Court Operations Budget Summary Level is to hold hearings and address legal requirements for defendants and others, help defendants understand the Court's expectations, and assist them in successfully complying with court orders. Some proceedings are held in formal courtrooms and others in magistrate offices, with the goal of providing timely resolution of alleged violations of City ordinances and misdemeanor crimes committed within the Seattle city limits.

<b>Program Expenditures</b>	<b>2023 Actuals</b>	<b>2024 Adopted</b>	<b>2025 Proposed</b>	<b>2026 Proposed</b>
Court Operations	17,735,127	17,683,258	23,607,387	24,918,707
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,735,127</b>	<b>17,683,258</b>	<b>23,607,387</b>	<b>24,918,707</b>
Full-time Equivalents Total*	131.75	131.75	146.35	146.35

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### **SMC - BO-MC-3000 - Administration**

The purpose of the Administration Budget Summary Level is to provide administrative controls, develop and provide strategic direction, and provide policy and program development.

<b>Program Expenditures</b>	<b>2023 Actuals</b>	<b>2024 Adopted</b>	<b>2025 Proposed</b>	<b>2026 Proposed</b>
Citywide Indirect Costs	11,736,321	12,611,162	10,634,114	11,129,520
Departmental Indirect Costs	7,065,405	8,078,720	11,985,411	12,433,984
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,801,726</b>	<b>20,689,882</b>	<b>22,619,525</b>	<b>23,563,505</b>
Full-time Equivalents Total*	38.00	39.00	54.50	54.50

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The following information summarizes the programs in Administration Budget Summary Level:

#### **Citywide Indirect Costs**

<b>Expenditures/FTE</b>	<b>2023 Actuals</b>	<b>2024 Adopted</b>	<b>2025 Proposed</b>	<b>2026 Proposed</b>
Citywide Indirect Costs	11,736,321	12,611,162	10,634,114	11,129,520
Full Time Equivalents Total	34.00	34.00	34.00	34.00

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## Departmental Indirect Costs

Expenditures/FTE	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
Departmental Indirect Costs	7,065,405	8,078,720	11,985,411	12,433,984
Full Time Equivalents Total	4.00	5.00	20.50	20.50

### **SMC - BO-MC-4000 - Court Compliance**

The purpose of the Court Compliance Budget Summary Level is to help defendants understand the Court's expectations and to assist them in successfully complying with court orders.

Program Expenditures	2023 Actuals	2024 Adopted	2025 Proposed	2026 Proposed
Court Compliance	5,048,645	4,906,840		
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,048,645</b>	<b>4,906,840</b>		
Full-time Equivalents Total*	32.10	31.10	-	-

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