

King County District Court



2021

Annual Report

Continuing Innovation in Public Service



King County

March 2022

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CHIEF PRESIDING JUDGE'S MESSAGE



Many of us who live and work in King County had hoped 2021 would bring an end to the COVID-19 Pandemic, but the virus continued to present new challenges throughout the year. I applaud the King County District Court staff and judges' professionalism and perseverance, and am grateful for the ongoing support of our city partners, policy makers and court users, as we continue innovating to provide the community with a place for peaceful resolution of conflicts – all while working to help keep everyone safe. And, a big thank you to Judge Susan Mahoney for all of her work as Chief Presiding Judge through a difficult few years in our region.

A key focus of the past year was our ongoing work to resolve the backlog of cases caused by the pandemic. After laying more groundwork in 2021, we started 2022 in a good position to continue making headway. District Court again has a full bench of 25 judges, as the King County Council appointed seven new judges in 2021 to fill vacancies resulting from judicial retirements and appointments to other courts (meet the new judges on page 4). We also began 2022 by adding two court commissioners, who will focus on the infractions and small claims backlog.

Among the milestones District Court achieved in 2021 was the opening of Community Court in Auburn, in partnership with the City of Auburn. In addition to South King County (Auburn), we now have Community Courts in East County (Redmond) and North County (Shoreline). These innovative courts help identify and address the underlying challenges of court participants that might contribute to further criminal activity, in order to make our communities safer and to improve the lives of individuals facing difficult circumstances.

This past year also saw tireless work by court staff and our new partners at the Cities of Algona and Pacific to enable transition of

their municipal court services to District Court as of January 1, 2022. With the addition of Algona and Pacific, 14 total cities throughout the county now contract with King County District Court for their municipal court services (see page 3).

District Court made substantial progress in 2021 on developing a new online Jury Management System that will provide jurors and court staff with one convenient platform to accomplish all jury-related tasks. Launching in 2022, the new system will automate much of the paper-based work the court currently uses in our jury work, while providing jurors with a simpler and more intuitive way to respond to their jury summons and to interact with District Court.

The Court also initiated a re-alignment of our administrative leadership structure to improve efficiencies by managing court calendars in a more coordinated way across our nine courthouse locations. By organizing our director-level leadership around case type rather than by geographic division, we also will be better structured to work with the state, our city partners and the bar. We anticipate completing these director changes in 2022. Our judicial leadership will continue to be organized by Division – East, South and West – to integrate the five electoral districts from which District Court judges are elected.

As I move into the role of Presiding Judge this month, I am grateful to be working with the dedicated District Court staff, leadership and judges, who rose to overcome the many challenges of 2021. I am confident that we and our stakeholders will meet and rise above whatever challenges 2022 has in store for us.

Matthew York
Chief Presiding Judge

March 2022

COURT OVERVIEW & SERVICES



Summary

Twenty-five elected and appointed judges and two court commissioners serve the public at nine King County District Court (KCDC) courthouse locations throughout the county (see map on page 3) and at the King County Jail in downtown Seattle.

KCDC is one of the busiest courts of limited jurisdiction in Washington state, and leads in many areas involving public safety and access to justice, with:

- The most problem-solving courts within a court of limited jurisdiction in the state
- Established judge-supervised probation for public safety and reduced recidivism
- Improved access to justice by integrating its multiple facilities as one court via governance and technology

Judicial Services Provided

King County District Court handles **infraction** and **misdemeanor** cases filed by King County and the State of Washington, and is contracted to provide **municipal court services** for 14 cities, as of January 1, 2022 (see map on page 3).

KCDC judges hold **felony first appearance hearings** at the King County Correctional Facility (downtown Seattle Jail) and at the Maleng Regional Justice Center (MRJC) in Kent. The court also accepts petitions for a range of **protective orders** and handles a variety of **civil matters**, including **small claims cases**.

The District Court administers several **therapeutic courts**, including King County Regional Mental Health Court (RMHC), Regional Veterans Court (RVC) and Community Courts in Auburn, Redmond and Shoreline (see pages 7 & 8).

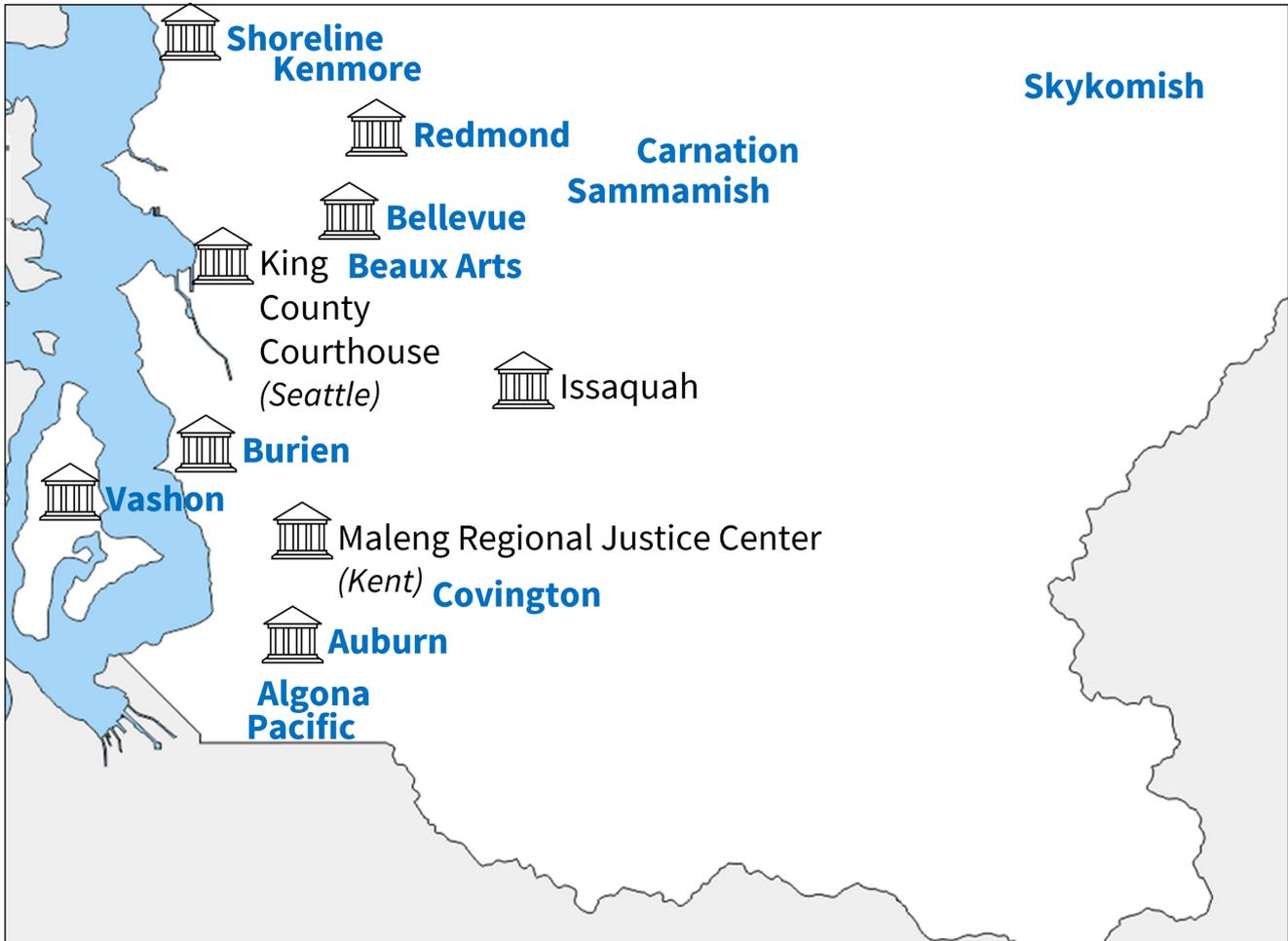
As a court of limited jurisdiction, KCDC is responsible for the following types of matters:

- Civil litigation up to \$100,000 per claimant
- Small claims up to \$10,000
- Nuisance violations
- False alarm hearings
- Vehicle tow & impound hearings
- Anti-harassment orders
- Domestic violence protection orders
- Name changes
- Infractions (traffic, non-traffic and parking)
- Misdemeanor & gross misdemeanor criminal cases
- Felony expedited cases
- Felony preliminary hearings
- Search warrants
- Garnishments & other supplemental proceedings
- Lien foreclosure and forfeiture hearings

Funding

Funding for the Court is primarily through the King County General Fund, which is supported by property and sales taxes. KCDC therapeutic courts are funded by the King County MIDD Behavioral Health Sales Tax Fund and the King County Veterans, Seniors and Human Services Levy (VSHSL).

LOCATIONS & CONTRACTING CITIES



King County District Court
courthouse locations

**Cities contracting for King County
District Court services (as of January 1, 2022)**



Appointments in 2021

The King County Council appointed seven judges to District Court in 2021 to fill judicial vacancies created in 2020 and 2021.



Judge
Kuljinder Dhillon



Judge
Fa'amomoi Masaniai



Judge
E. Rania Rampersad



Judge
Rebecca Robertson



Judge
Kristin Shotwell



Judge
Leah Taguba



Judge
Brian Todd

Departures in 2021

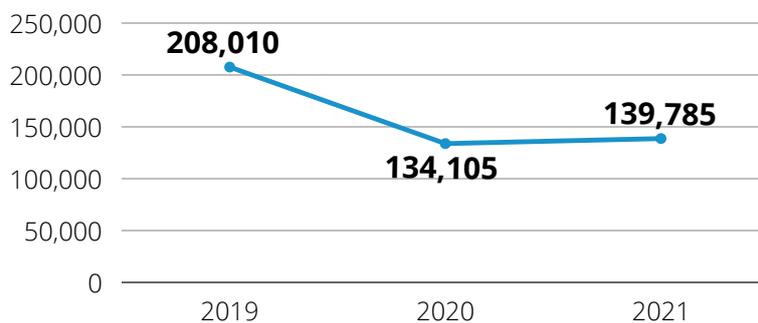
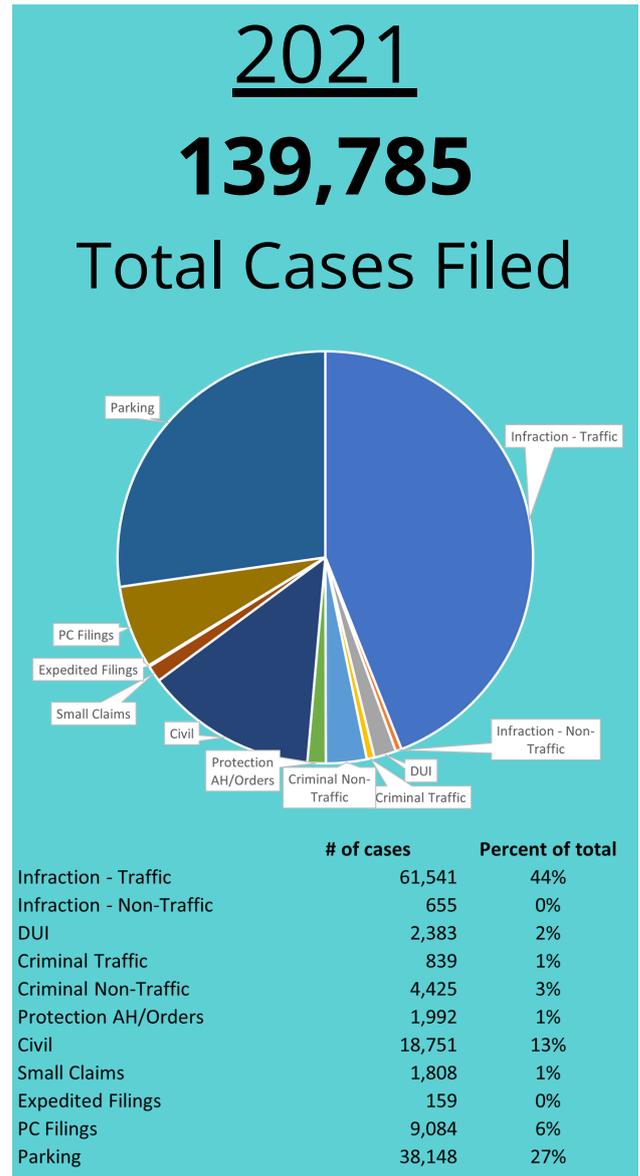
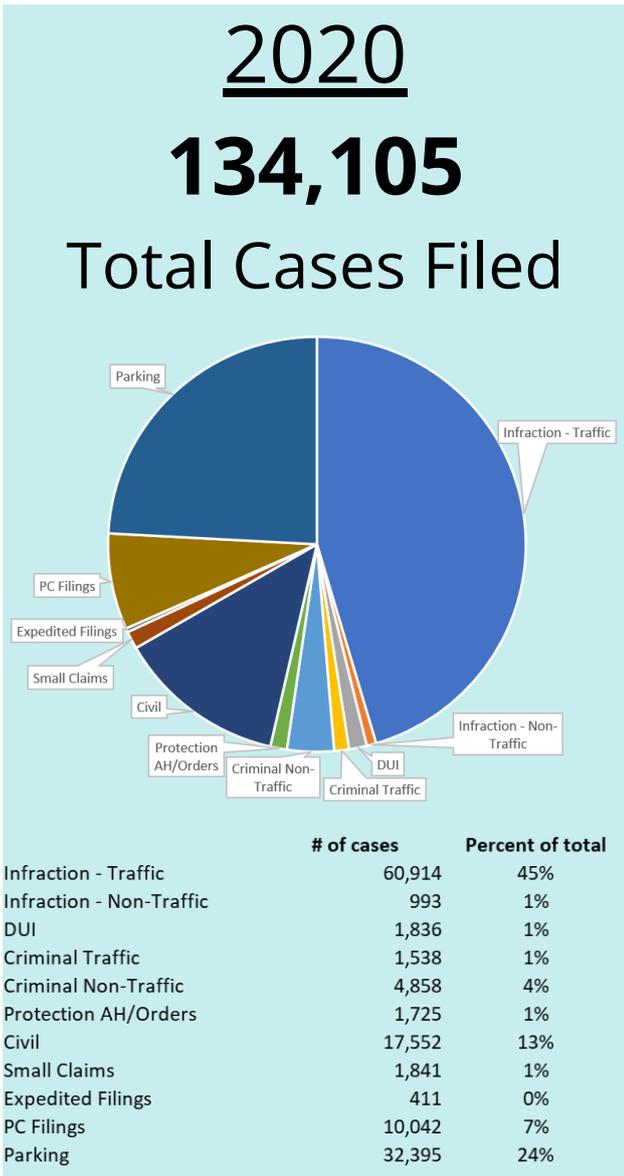
- Judge Arthur Chapman (Retired)
- Judge Mark Chow (Retired)
- Judge David Christie (Retired)
- Judge Jason Poydras (Appointed to King County Superior Court)
- Judge Donna Tucker (Retired)

CASELOAD STATISTICS



2021 Court Filings

Parties filed 5,680 more cases in King County District Court (KCDC) in 2021 than they did in 2020 (a 4.2% increase). The total number of filings in each year was lower than historical trends due to the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic. For comparison, in the last pre-pandemic year (2019), parties filed 208,010 total cases with the court.



EQUITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE (ESJ)



As part of fulfilling its mission, King County District Court (KCDC) is active in advancing equity and social justice (ESJ) initiatives throughout the court system.

Court's Mission Statement

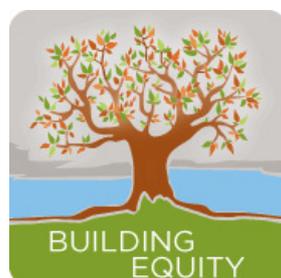
King County District Court will serve the public by:

- Providing an accessible forum for the fair, efficient and understandable resolution of civil and criminal cases
- Maintaining an atmosphere of respect for the dignity of all individuals

The court has an active **Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) Committee** that strives to raise awareness of KCDC employees and judges regarding the importance of an equitable criminal justice system for all people. The committee – comprised of judges, directors, managers, and court and probation staff – arranges training, discussions and other resources inside and outside the court. These efforts have resulted in King County District Court being recognized for its leadership in advancing courageous conversations around racial equity within Washington state courts.

2021 Highlights

- Provided **"Silence=Acceptance" training** on racial equity to 1,000+ participants in the court community across Washington state, in partnership with the Washington Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and the District and Municipal Court Management Association (DMCMA)
- Led **"We are not a Monolith" training** within District Court to highlight the impacts Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders face from racial discrimination
- Conducted a **re-enactment of the Vincent Chin murder trial** for KCDC employees and judges to demonstrate how court proceedings and verdicts might be impacted by race – This landmark 1980s case in Michigan led to Asian Americans being designated as a protected class in the U.S.
- Established **libraries of ESJ-themed books** in all KCDC courthouse locations as an educational resource for employees and judges, and initiated discussion groups for people in the court who read these books



THERAPEUTIC COURTS



King County District Court operates several innovative therapeutic courts, including King County Regional Mental Health Court (RMHC), King County Regional Veterans Court (RVC) and Community Courts in Auburn, Redmond and Shoreline.

Washington State Legislature's Description of Therapeutic Courts

Judges in the trial courts throughout the state effectively utilize what are known as therapeutic courts to remove a defendant's or respondent's case from the criminal and civil court traditional trial track and allow those defendants or respondents the opportunity to obtain treatment services to address particular issues that may have contributed to the conduct that led to their arrest or other issues before the court. *RCW 2.30.010 (1)*

Regional Mental Health Court (RMHC)

RMHC's mission is to engage, support and facilitate the sustained stability of individuals with mental health disorders within the criminal justice system, while reducing recidivism and increasing community safety.

The court has been proven to reduce criminal recidivism by 26% and to increase participation in substance use disorder treatment by 37 percentage points, according to a 2018 report by the Washington State Dept. of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

"Mental Health Court has given me a chance to be a healthy person and a productive member of society. It has provided people that I trust will help me."

~ RMHC graduate

2021 RMHC Statistics

- 46 participants graduated from the program
- 247 people participated in the program during the year (many of those who had not graduated at the end of the year are continuing in 2022)

Regional Veterans Court (RVC)

King County District Court recognizes that veterans in the justice system may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other service-related disabilities. RVC seeks to increase effective cooperation between federal, state and local veterans service agencies and the criminal justice system in order to address the underlying issues that resulted in the veteran being referred to the criminal justice system. The program will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2022.

"I was really down and out, started drinking too much and got in trouble with the law; Veterans Court gave me the strength to keep my sobriety going and keep my health up."

~ Richard, RVC graduate

THERAPEUTIC COURTS (continued)



2021 RVC Statistics

- 23 veterans graduated from the program
- 60 veterans participated in the program during the year (many of those who had not graduated at the end of the year are continuing in 2022)

Community Courts

Community courts provide services and accountability for those who are eligible and choose to participate. An assessment is conducted for all community court participants to identify their challenges and strengths. The assessment provides information to help determine what follow-up steps an individual community court participant will be required to take. Among other actions, participants often are required to perform community service. King County District Court operates three Community Courts:

- Community Court in Auburn (opened May 2021)
- Community Court in Redmond (opened April 2018)
- Community Court in Shoreline (opened January 2020)

“Community Court has given me the understanding that I’m not alone, and that we can dig ourselves out of a hole we’ve gotten ourselves into.”

~ Abi, Community Court in Redmond graduate

2021 Community Court Statistics

Total for Auburn, Redmond and Shoreline:

- 41 participants graduated from the program
- 90 active participants are continuing in the program, as of December 31, 2021
- 33 social service agencies per week at the court-affiliated Community Resource Centers
- 800+ visits to the the virtual or in-person Community Resource Centers by Community Court participants and community members

Community Court Locations



JUDGES, COURT COMMISSIONERS & LEADERSHIP

March 2022

Leadership

Judge Matthew York - Chief Presiding Judge

Judge Gregg Hirakawa - Assistant Chief Presiding Judge

Judge Lisa O'Toole - East Division Presiding Judge

Judge Laurel Gibson - South Division Presiding Judge

Judge Joe Campagna - West Division Presiding Judge

Othniel Palomino - Chief Administrative Officer

Tina Gill - Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

Judges

Virginia M. Amato

Marcine Anderson

Joe Campagna

Kuljinder Dhillon

Michael Finkle

Michelle Gehlsen

Laurel Gibson

Nathaniel Green

Corinna Harn

Gregg Hirakawa

Jill Klinge

Rhonda Laumann

Susan Mahoney

Fa'amomoi Masaniai

Marcus Naylor

Lisa O'Toole

Lisa Paglisotti

Kevin Peck

E. Rania Rampersad

Rebecca C. Robertson

Kristin Shotwell

Elizabeth D. Stephenson

Leah Taguba

Brian Todd

Matthew York

Court Commissioners

Michael Morgan

Peter Peaquin