

Local Court & Criminal Justice Overview

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SW Precinct Liaison

Topics

- My role as precinct liaison
- Local court structure
- Anatomy of a criminal case
- Common issues & misconceptions



Seattle City Attorney's Office Precinct Liaison Program

Mission

- Long-term, proactive partnership
 - City Attorney's Office (Civil & Criminal)
 - SPD
 - Public and Private Organizations
 - The Community
- Solve neighborhood problems, improve public safety, and enhance the quality of life of community members.



Seattle City Attorney's Office Precinct Liaison Program

History

- Started in 1995
- Initially worked out of downtown, carrying regular caseload
- Transitioned to working solely on problem-solving work, out in the precincts, with the help of federal grant funds
- Currently supported by City funds, with five liaisons covering the five police precincts



Seattle City Attorney's Office Precinct Liaison Program

Goals

- Reduce crime and enhance the quality of life in Seattle neighborhoods.
- Develop a more efficient and effective response to public safety problems.
- Improve communication among residents, prosecutors, police and other city departments involved in problem-solving efforts.



Seattle City Attorney's Office Precinct Liaison Program

Responsibilities

- Providing real-time, proactive legal advice for officers in each precinct.
- Protecting SPD resources by working closely with other City agencies to address neighborhood problems before they become SPD criminal problems.
- Litigating appropriate code and criminal violations resulting from these efforts.
- Facilitating community and intergovernmental communication and cooperation.

Court Overview

- Seattle Municipal Court
- King County District Court
- King County Superior Court
- U.S. District Court



Subject matter jurisdiction

A court's legal authority to decide an issue in controversy.

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Territorial jurisdiction

The geographical bounds of a court's legal authority.



A photograph of the Seattle Municipal Court building, a modern multi-story structure with a glass facade, situated in an urban environment with other skyscrapers in the background. The image is framed within a blue gradient background that also features faint binary code (0s and 1s) on the left side.

Seattle Municipal Court

- “Court of limited jurisdiction”
 - Subject matter
 - Violations of City Ordinances
 - Maximum penalty = 1 year & \$5,000 fine
 - Territory
 - Anywhere within the city



King County District Court

- “Court of limited jurisdiction”
 - Subject matter
 - Misdemeanors & gross misdemeanor crimes
 - Violations of city ordinances
 - Maximum penalty = 1 year & \$5,000 fine
 - Territory
 - Anywhere within King County

Courts of limited jurisdiction

- Misdemeanors
 - Maximum penalty = 90 days jail & \$1000.00 fine
 - E.g.:
 - pedestrian interference
 - resisting arrest
 - indecent exposure
 - prostitution/sexual exploitation

Courts of limited jurisdiction, cont.

- Gross Misdemeanors
 - Maximum penalty = 364 days jail & \$5000.00 fine
 - E.g.:
 - Driving Under the Influence
 - Car Prowling
 - Theft
 - Simple Assault

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King County Superior Court

- Court of general jurisdiction
 - Subject matter
 - Everything
 - Felonies (practically speaking)
 - Territory
 - Anywhere within King County

Property Crimes

- Non-felony

- Vehicle Prowl (less than two prior convictions)
- Theft < \$750
- Criminal Trespass
- Property destruction < \$750
- Possession of burglary tools

- Felony

- Burglary
- Robbery
- Arson
- Fraud
- Possession of a stolen vehicle
- Trafficking in stolen property

Anatomy of a Criminal Case

Investigation

- Crime reported/detected
- Police investigate – interview suspects/witnesses, collect/analyze evidence, etc.
- Forward the case to court/prosecutor's office



Prosecution

- Charging decision
- Arraignment
- Pretrial proceedings
- Trial

Punishment

- Sentencing
- Probation



Common Issues & Misconceptions

- Arrests
 - Timing can vary wildly
 - vs. conviction
- Booking
 - Doesn't follow automatically after arrest
- Pretrial release
 - On “personal recognizance”
 - On bail or bond
 - Conditions of release

Common Issues & Misconceptions, cont.

- Decision points = delays
 - Investigation stage
 - Charging decision
 - Trial decisions
 - Pretrial negotiations
 - Defense investigations
 - Discovery issues
- Filing policies

Victim's Rights

- RCW 7.69.030 – Victim, survivor or witness has a right to:
 - Be informed of the final disposition of the case
 - To receive protection from harm arising out of cooperation
 - To be informed of the procedure to be followed to apply for and receive any witness fees
 - To be provided with a secure waiting area when testifying
 - To be physically present in court during trial (victims/survivors)
 - To be informed by the prosecutor of the date/time/place for trial and sentencing upon request (victim/survivor)
 - To submit a victim impact statement to the court (felonies)
 - To restitution

