STATE OF THE CITIES

The communities we serve:

Evolving public safety & criminal justice services

AWC
ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON CITIES

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Introduction

Public safety is a core responsibility of city government, and Washington cities are leading efforts to address evolving public safety needs. Cities foster public safety in a variety of ways, including: preventing crime, protecting the public, transforming police departments to address accountability and increase trust, partnering with behavioral health professionals to serve individuals in crisis, equipping courts with therapeutic programs to help individuals with substance use disorder, and providing other vital services to communities across the state.

Without additional state investments, however, cities are struggling to address emerging public safety challenges—increasing crime rates, a national debate on the role of and trust in police departments, difficulties with recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers, substance use and behavioral health crises, changing expectations from residents, and limited revenue resources.

Strong cities need:

1. **Additional tools for recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers,** including the ability to hire part-time law enforcement work, sufficient capacity for Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC) Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA) classes, and financial flexibility to utilize city revenue for public safety needs.
2. **Greater state financial support** for co-responder and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) teams and for misdemeanor-level therapeutic court programs.
3. **A robust and accessible statewide network of substance use disorder and behavioral health services and treatment** to ensure access to care for all residents at all stages of need, from crisis treatment and inpatient care to long-term outpatient recovery needs.

By 2030, another 350,000 people are expected to move to Washington. For cities, the landscape is changing: populations are changing, expectations are changing, demands are increasing, and with that, law enforcement and the criminal justice system must continue to evolve, too. This report details some of the success stories and current challenges that cities experience in providing public safety and criminal justice services.

All of Washington's 281 cities and towns are unique, with different challenges and strengths. Although the challenges are many, there are common areas where the collective voice of cities can encourage increased support for the great work that cities and towns do. In this year's *State of the Cities* report, AWC examines the present condition of public safety, along with the current state of criminal justice and behavioral health systems, to explore challenges that cities face and discover areas where cities can learn from each other.

This publication refers to cities and towns using the term "cities" for brevity.

1 Public safety is a top priority for cities

Public safety is a core responsibility of city government. Washington's cities are made safer places to live, learn, work, and play thanks to high-quality police, court, prosecution, public defense, and jail services delivered by municipal staff. Some cities are direct providers of some or all of these services, and cities without their own police department partner with neighboring cities or their county to provide public safety services.

Nearly **70% of Washington cities** have their own police department.

Public safety is a top concern for Washington cities. In a recent survey of AWC members, **70% of cities** listed public safety as a "top five" policy priority.

Cities are experiencing an increase in crime, especially violent crime and other crimes against people, property crimes, vehicle theft (including catalytic converters), and drug possession.

In response to increased crime, many cities have bolstered public safety funding. **62% of cities** reported that they planned to increase funding for public safety over the prior year, including many cities that planned to increase funding by more than 10%.

Increase in crime

Statewide, crimes against people have increased

Overall crime rate

2022: 5% increase

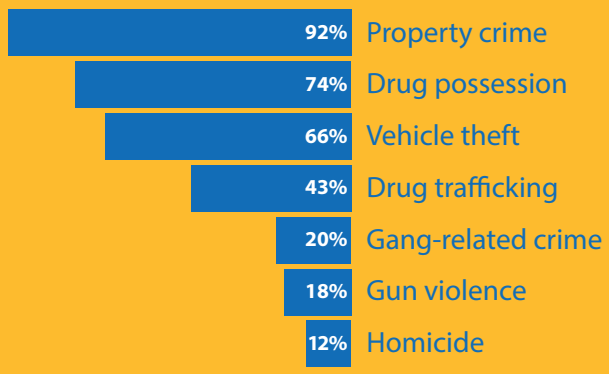
Violent crime rate

2022: 9% increase

Homicide rate

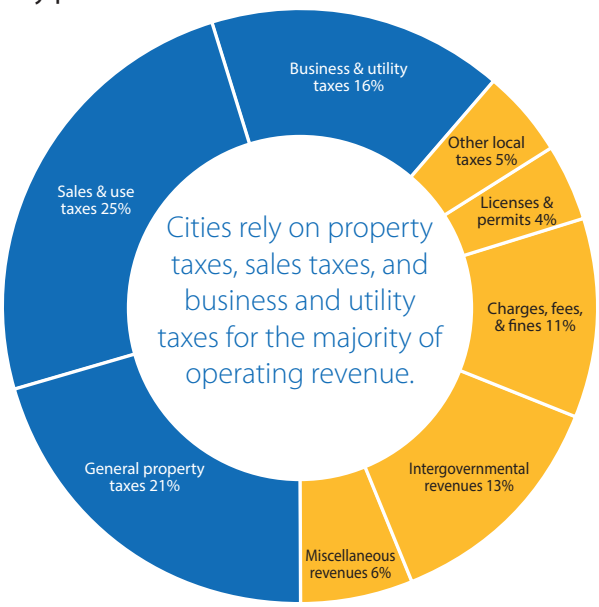
2022: 17% increase, totaling 394 murders

Cities reported an increase in crime in their communities in 2023



Funding the public safety system

On average, nearly half of a city's operating budget is spent on police officer and firefighter salaries, emergency medical services, courts, and jails. The majority of those expenses include costs for vital public safety personnel.



Source: State Auditor's Office; general fund, special revenues.

Source: State Auditor's Office; general fund, special revenues.

Source: Office of the State Actuary

As cities have taken on new public safety challenges, new revenues have not kept pace or allowed cities to expand programs. The added cost burden, combined with limited revenue options for cities, requires cities to shift resources away from other popular and important services such as parks and recreation and street repair. This is not a new challenge, but must be addressed in the context of the state's significant investment and partnership with cities.

Revenue

Most of the public safety budget comes out of a city's general fund. However, cities can use other sources of revenue to provide those services to their communities.

State-shared revenues

Some of the funds come to cities as distributions from the state general fund or come as restricted revenue distributions from state or county taxes. State-shared revenues are distributed and allocated to cities and towns by a formula, usually set by state statute or determined by the Legislature in the state budget process. While some state-shared revenues are influenced by local policies (such as the cannabis excise tax), most are distributed based on population or other factors that are beyond the city's direct control.

Grants

Federal grant funding is often available, but it is one-time funding, very limited in amount, and highly competitive.

Local options

Cities have few tools of their own to generate additional revenue for public safety or criminal justice purposes; however, cities can receive funding from two optional countywide sales taxes: the 0.1% criminal justice sales tax and the 0.3% public safety sales tax. Revenues from these sources are shared on a per capita basis using different formulas. Cities also have the authority to impose their own 0.1% public safety sales tax with voter approval.

Fines and fees

Cities generate some revenue from a portion of civil penalties, such as traffic or parking infractions, and from criminal misdemeanor fines, such as driving under the influence.

For a more detailed description of revenue sources, see Appendix.

Traffic tickets – Where does the revenue go?

One misconception is that cities retain all traffic ticket revenue. This is simply not true.

Although local law enforcement officers write the majority of ticket infractions in Washington, cities split the revenue they receive with the state general fund and dedicated funding sources.

The base fine for each infraction is set by the Washington Supreme Court.

Overall, traffic ticket revenue is down significantly in recent years, causing deficits in many of the programs funded with traffic fines.

Breakdown of a $145 ticket

	City revenue	State remittance
City or county issuing the ticket	$48.11	
State general fund		$57.89
Judicial Information System (JIS) Account JIS is the primary information system for Washington state and local courts. It serves as a statewide clearinghouse for criminal history information.		$23
Trauma Care Account This account funds the trauma care system, including EMS, trauma care services, rehabilitation, and related planning and development.		$5
Traumatic Brain Injury Account Supports statewide comprehensive community planning related to traumatic brain injuries.		$5
Driver Licensing Technology Support Information technology systems used by the department to communicate with the Judicial Information System, manage driving records, and implement court orders.		$6
Subtotals	$48.11	$96.89
Total	**$145**	

Cities only receive 1/3 of typical traffic ticket fines

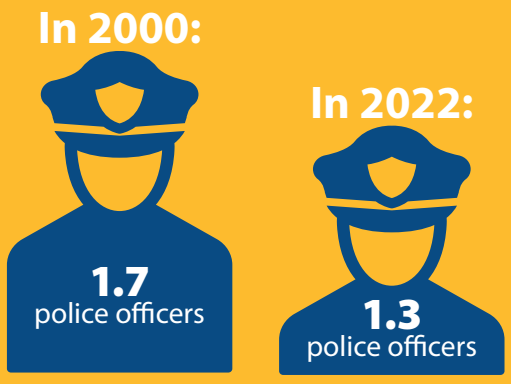
Recruitment and retention challenges

55% of the state's commissioned law enforcement officers are city police

Cities in 2020 reported that public safety costs were the area within municipal budgets most likely to increase. The primary cost driver for public safety, like many city services, is wages and benefits.

Washington's police officer to population ratio has decreased

For every 1,000 residents:



Washington state is facing historic vacancies in law enforcement, and cities across the state face challenges with hiring and maintaining police officers necessary to do critical work.

Despite already having one of the lowest numbers of law enforcement officers per capita in the country, Washington cities are also dealing with extra stressors:

- **70%** of cities foresee hiring new officers as a major challenge;
- **Nearly 40%** of current law enforcement officers are either eligible for retirement, or will become eligible, in the next few years; and
- **41% of cities** anticipate that retirements or resignations will impact their public safety staffing.

Many officers are eligible for retirement

Washington Department of Retirement Systems, 2022

This problem is not unique to Washington. A national survey in 2020 found that police departments are only filling about 93% of budgeted positions available. An ongoing national debate regarding police culture, use of force, and law enforcement generally, has impacted the public's view of law enforcement as a career. This, combined with in-state challenges such as delays for officers to be accepted into the CJTC BLEA and the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, have further exacerbated the problem locally. These challenges are compounded by the aging demographics of our state's police force, with 37% of officers eligible for retirement now or in the next few years. Some of these challenges can be addressed at the state level, others must be solved at the local level, and some involve national cultural shifts that will likely take years to resolve.

In AWC's 2023 City Conditions Survey, 70% of cities reported that hiring new police officers was the most significant challenge they expected to face in their police departments. This is true even though cities are offering financial incentives:

- **42%** are offering financial hiring incentives for lateral transfers;
- **29%** say they offer financial incentives for new hires; and
- **24%** offer financial incentives for retaining existing officers.

The problem is further impacted by the delay between the time a police recruit is hired and when they can obtain the necessary training at the Basic Law Enforcement Academy (BLEA). Since the 1970s, the CJTC has provided standardized, mandatory training for law enforcement agencies statewide through the BLEA.

Recent state legislative appropriations aimed at creating new regional training academies are focused on decreasing wait times to enter BLEA and providing new options for those who previously were unable to spend eight months away from home for training in Burien or Spokane.

Thanks to an additional $3,437,000 in funding approved in the 2023-2025 state operating budget, CJTC will increase the number of BLEA classes from 20 to 23 per year and add six classes each year at the regional academies in Pasco, Skagit County, and Clark County. Additional capacity will likely be needed to keep up with the necessary pace of hiring new law enforcement officers.

As cities strive to keep their communities safe, the difficulties in recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers are of paramount concern.

"One of the biggest effects of the vacancies has been longer response times to 911 calls."

– Vancouver Police Chief Jeff Mori

Understaffed departments also put increased pressure on existing staff and budgets.

A well-trained and staffed law enforcement agency is vitally important to every community. As cities work to create and maintain professional, community-oriented police departments, cities need the state to partner with local governments to improve public safety by assisting with recruitment and retention efforts.

Reforms

Across the nation, calls for reform have intensified in recent years, and law enforcement is at the center of an intense and ongoing national debate. Public outcry led to demands for changes to training and certification, standards for use of force, and new systems for decertification of officers.

In a 2022 Gallup poll, 90% of Americans supported changes in law enforcement, with half of those surveyed supporting "major changes." The public made it clear that they expect a high level of professionalism, reasonable response times, trauma-informed and culturally competent police officers, and fairness and objectivity in the enforcement of the law.

Nationwide, state legislatures have responded, including the Washington Legislature's passage of reforms in 2021.

Legislative requirements and increasing liability insurance are weighing on city leaders' minds:

- **60% of cities** listed public safety-related legislative directives as one of their biggest challenges in 2023; and
- **36% of cities** named increasing liability costs in the same category.

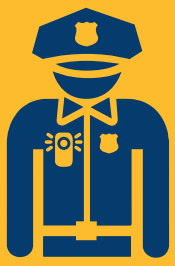
Cities are working to meet community demands for more transparent policing, adopting innovative policing policies and alternative response teams, and providing additional training. While critical, these additional programs are costly and paid primarily through a city's general fund. Even without these additional programs, public safety costs typically use nearly half of a city's general fund budget.

How city officials are responding

Response to public demands has not been limited to the state Legislature—it is ongoing at the local level. City councilmembers, mayors, and managers/administrators play a key role in promoting and maintaining public trust in the city's police department. These officials should not limit their oversight role to creation of the city's budget. Instead, they can and should set appropriate policies for the police department and ensure local accountability.

2021 Washington state law enforcement reforms

- Prohibiting the use of choke holds or neck restraints
- Prohibiting the use of a "no-knock" warrant
- Modifying the standard for when an officer may engage in a police vehicle pursuit
- Limiting the kinds of surplus weapons a department may receive from the military
- Limiting when officers may use tear gas and requiring the highest-ranking elected official in a jurisdiction to authorize the use of tear gas against members of the public
- Establishing a duty for law enforcement officers to immediately intervene if a fellow officer is using excessive force and to render aid to the person
- Requiring officers to report any criminal conduct by another officer
- Establishing a statewide standard for use of force
- Limiting when and how law enforcement officers can use force against members of the public and establishing additional training requirements. The legislation created an expectation for officers to de-escalate and requires law enforcement to exercise care in the use of any force in order to reduce violence and prioritize the sanctity of life.



Body-worn cameras

One notable area where city councils have taken the lead in increasing integrity and accountability of law enforcement is with body-worn cameras.

Body cameras record interactions between police and the people they encounter and are popular with the public. Electronic recording is now required anytime an officer conducts a custodial interview (RCW 10.122), but body-worn cameras also offer departments an opportunity to foster accountability, transparency, and legitimacy—to build trust and improve relationships with their communities. As of 2020, only about 25% of law enforcement agencies had body cameras, but roughly half of those without body cameras were seeking funding or taking other steps towards implementing a body-worn camera program.

Despite the benefits, the expense of body-worn camera programs have kept this technology out of many police departments. Body cameras include physical cameras, but also include camera maintenance, data storage, IT staff time, training, video redaction—the total cost per camera can exceed $2,000 per year. For a department of any size, this can be a significant ongoing expense. Body cameras, when implemented well, can be a technology that plays a role in a department's transparency efforts.

2 The changing role of crisis first response

Cities are not traditionally direct behavioral health service providers, yet law enforcement officers are increasingly dispatched to behavioral, mental health, and substance use crises. Nationally, behavioral health and substance use concerns represent roughly 20% of 911 calls. A crisis of this type can be both tragic and dangerous for the individuals, families, and communities involved.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides much of the federal funding to states for behavioral health programs. This funding is further distributed to counties, behavioral health administrative service organizations (BHASOs), accountable communities of health (ACHs), and ultimately to service providers.

In communities across the state, extreme disparities exist in access to frontline first responders, behavioral health resources, and drug treatment. Cities are often on the front line trying to address the problems created by the lack of available services and are asked to resolve issues during a crisis.

The Legislature has made significant investments in this system in the past few years, but major gaps still remain. Many communities do not have local options to divert people into drug treatment—or the nearest service center is often located many miles away from the community.

Washington is experiencing historically high numbers of drug overdoses

In 2021:

2,264 fatal overdoses

4,901 nonfatal hospitalizations

People in crisis need...

Someone to talk to | **Someone to respond** | **Somewhere to go**

Additionally, complicated and overlapping systems often mean that the responder who shows up first to the scene of a crisis may not be equipped to handle it.

A number of cities are adopting alternative response programs that complement or replace a traditional law enforcement response with one that takes a holistic approach to an individual's needs. Many situations require professionals trained in a different set of skills than law enforcement officers. Community diversion options like mental health co-responders, Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), and Community Advocates for Referral and Education Services (CARES) programs have proven successful as alternatives for responding to crises.

- **25% of cities** have an arrest and jail alternatives program (e.g., LEAD);
- **39% of cities** pair a behavioral health or mental health co-responder with law enforcement when appropriate;
- An additional **19% of cities** have fire-based co-responders (e.g., CARES); and
- **16% of cities** operate mobile crisis response.

Additionally, 25% offer pre-trial diversion and 27% operate a therapeutic, community, or substance use disorder court.

Co-response

Co-response refers to a diverse set of programs characterized by behavioral health personnel embedded within, or responding alongside, law enforcement or emergency management services personnel. This can take the form of different models including:

1. Ride-along where a behavioral health clinician responds with an officer;
2. Behavioral health personnel who are embedded in or part of a department that respond with or without other personnel, and wearing clothing that identifies them as part of that department; and
3. A team that follows up with a person in crisis after contact by a first responder.

Cities or partners can also have community responder teams that work independently of law enforcement and fire—mobile crisis teams that respond directly to an individual in crisis and connect them with services.

The first responder will often be a city police officer or the fire department, but the emergency need does not end with the arrival of the first responder. Cities rely on counties and the state to support a robust behavioral health system for individuals in crisis to receive necessary treatment and care.

Cities are training and equipping first responders to handle these types of calls and are developing industry best-practice models for co-responder teams.

But even the best co-responder team cannot provide comprehensive treatment to an individual in crisis. Appropriate, quality treatment for substance use disorder, behavioral health conditions, and co-occurring disorders must be immediately accessible to all who require treatment.

Law enforcement alternative programs

Broadly speaking, a Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program seeks to divert non-violent, low-level offenders to support services to help them overcome challenges and avoid arrest or jail time. In 2023, the Legislature established an ongoing grant program for Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion. While this investment in LEAD programs was a vital first step, increased funding in future years will be necessary to develop LEAD programs throughout the state at the scale necessary to address the growing behavioral health and substance use disorder challenges in our state.

Case studies

Case study
Whatcom County LEAD program

All municipal police departments, including the Bellingham Police Department, and the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office partner for a joint LEAD program that launched in 2020. In addition to all local law enforcement agencies, the Whatcom County LEAD program partners with local prosecuting attorneys' offices, therapeutic courts, local treatment providers, and other community stakeholders.

The Whatcom County LEAD program provides support to individuals who have frequent interactions with law enforcement and who commit low-level criminal offenses resulting from mental and behavioral health challenges, substance use, homelessness, and extreme poverty. The LEAD program utilizes a case manager to help address and eliminate the root causes of criminal behavior. This includes providing participants with guidance in obtaining stable housing, medication management, substance use disorder treatment, and job opportunities.

"I honestly think this program saved [my grandson's] life."

– Kelly, grandmother of participant in Whatcom County LEAD program

Case study
Poulsbo co-responder program

In 2021, the Poulsbo Fire Department and the City of Poulsbo launched their Fire CARES program as a part of the Mobile Integrated Health Response Unit. The goal of the CARES program is to connect individuals to appropriate care and services and to reduce the impact of nonemergency calls on fire and police departments. The program is staffed by a firefighter/EMT trained in crisis intervention, a social worker, and a substance use disorder professional. The CARES unit is a multidisciplinary team aimed at preventing crisis by being proactive in the field.

The CARES team responds to individuals struggling with behavioral health issues and helps them navigate the situation—whether they need medical attention, mental health care, substance use disorder services, or other kinds of care. The program has grown to accept fire and police referrals across North Kitsap communities—including Poulsbo, Suquamish, and Bainbridge Island. The CARES team works closely with area schools and service providers to improve access to care.

Case study
Regional Crisis Response Agency

The communities of Bothell, Kenmore, Kirkland, Lake Forest Park, and Shoreline worked together to create the Regional Crisis Response (RCR, pronounced 'racer') Agency – a new regional partnership that provides crisis de-escalation, intervention, and navigation to the system of care. Early data from the new program shows:

- **67% reduction** in jail bookings;
- **60% reduction** in crisis services events; and
- **4% reduction** in emergency department visits.

Cities cannot face these challenges alone. They rely on collaboration across systems. Cities can only support vulnerable community members and protect public safety if there are adequate mental health, behavioral health, and substance use disorder treatment facilities in our state. When law enforcement encounters someone in crisis, there must be quality, accessible treatment ready for them. To ensure public safety throughout Washington, cities rely on a strong partnership with the state—one dedicated to continuing to expand and grow vital behavioral health resources and treatment.

3 Courts and the criminal justice system

Counties and the state are critical partners to cities in the criminal justice system. City police officers are often the first line of contact in felony cases, which are prosecuted exclusively by the county. County sheriffs and state patrol enforce laws within their jurisdictions and provide mutual aid to many city police departments. The cooperation between city, county, and state begins early in the criminal justice process, but does not end there.

The separate and independent municipal courts represent the judicial branch of local government. Cities provide court services in a variety of ways. City governments provide judicial services either directly through a municipal court or by contracting with a municipal or county district court. Cities also contract with their district courts, sometimes for the courtroom judge and sometimes for prosecution and/or defense services and administration.

Depending on the severity of the crime and the jurisdiction, a case will take one of several routes:

Felonies are prosecuted by county prosecutors in county superior court, and if the defendant is held on a pre-trial basis, the defendant will be held in county jail. If the defendant is sentenced to more than a year in jail, they will be transferred to a state correctional facility. If their sentence is less than one year, they may serve their time in the county jail.

Misdemeanors (simple misdemeanors and gross misdemeanors) are handled in several ways:

- If a city contracts with its county, the case goes to the county prosecutors in county district court.
- If a city operates its own municipal court or contracts with a municipal court, the case goes to the city prosecutors, where indigent defense attorneys may be full-time employees or contracted attorneys. The case will be handled at the municipal court.

In either situation:

- The costs of prosecution and defense are paid by the city—either directly or through a contract with the county.
- If a defendant is held in jail at any time, it will be in either a municipal jail or the county jail. Regardless of the location, the city in which the crime allegedly occurred is responsible for covering the jail costs, including medical treatment administered while in custody.

Defendants are constitutionally entitled to legal representation if they cannot afford a private attorney. The costs of the defense attorney in misdemeanor cases are borne by the city, either through directly providing attorney services or through a contract with the county. Defense attorneys are limited to no more than 300-400 misdemeanor cases per attorney per year, as set by the Washington Supreme Court.

The process is well-coordinated but is not the same in each city. Every municipal court and county court has slightly different court rules, dockets, and administrative processes. All of this is intended to reach a consistent level of justice statewide, based upon the needs and resources of each community. For this reason, imposing "one-size-fits-all" solutions are particularly challenging for a system that varies throughout the state and operates 24-7, 365 days per year. The system cannot be "paused" while new legislative changes are implemented.

The criminal justice system faces workforce challenges

Nationwide defense attorney shortages mean that Washington state also feels the strain of finding enough qualified defense attorneys who are willing to do public defense work.

Nearly 7% of Washington's cities provide their own city jail. Cities that do not provide their own police, jail, or court typically contract with their county, another city, or another governmental entity (such as a tribal government).

Courts

Washington Supreme Court

- Appeals from the Court of Appeals
- Administers the state court system

Court of Appeals (Division I – Seattle; Division II – Tacoma; Division III – Spokane)

- Appeals from lower courts

Superior Court (serve the county, or cluster of counties, in which they are located)

- Civil matters
- Domestic relations
- Felony criminal cases
- Juvenile matters
- Appeals from courts of limited jurisdiction

Courts of Limited Jurisdiction (district and municipal courts)

- Misdemeanor criminal cases, including driving under the influence, reckless driving, and fourth degree assault
- Traffic, non-traffic, and parking infractions
- For municipal courts: violations of municipal or city ordinances
- Domestic violence protection orders
- Civil actions of $75,000 or less
- Small claims up to $10,000

According to the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), 90.9% of cases filed in 2022 were filed at the municipal or district court level, totaling nearly 1.5 million cases. Washington cities operate 100 municipal courts, some with full municipal court jurisdiction and others for violations/citations only.

100 cities operate their own municipal court.

Municipal courts	Operated by one city to serve its own court needs.
Community courts	Hosted by one city to serve its own court needs as well as those of one or more neighboring cities through interlocal agreements.
District courts	County courts with jurisdiction over both criminal and civil cases. District courts may serve an entire county or a portion of a county. Many cities contract with district courts to provide services within city limits.
Municipal departments	Operate as part of a district court. Cities generally provide facilities and staff while paying the county for services of a district court judge.
Traffic violations bureaus (TVBs)	Operate under supervision of the municipal or district court serving the city. A TVB expedites the handling of traffic cases not requiring any judicial involvement or potential incarceration.

Due to the critical nature of criminal justice work and the constitutional requirement to provide it, cities often must cut popular discretionary parts of their general fund budget, including parks and recreation, to pay for increasing costs.

Cities have found numerous cost-saving measures in providing municipal court services, including partnering with neighboring cities to share court resources, limiting court operational hours, and utilizing contract judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys.

Cities identify cost-effectiveness, convenience, and community service as reasons for operating their own court. In establishing its own municipal court, a city can have more control over therapeutic court offerings, community courts servicing people who are unhoused, general court administration, pre-trial diversion programs, work crew programs, and other benefits. Like law enforcement, courts are personnel-intensive services with the bulk of resources expended on salaries, benefits, and training.

Case studies

Case study
Olympia Municipal Community Court

The City of Olympia established a community court to emphasize alternative responses to less serious crimes committed by some of the most vulnerable in the community. Community courts are an alternative response to traditional punishment, instead prioritizing solving the root causes of the crimes.

By partnering with community stakeholders to provide support for housing, education, employment, substance use disorder treatment, health care, behavioral and mental health treatment, and veteran's services, the Olympia Community Court provides practical, targeted solutions to address the underlying issues that fuel criminal behavior and to prevent recidivism.

Olympia and Spokane community courts are two of four nationally recognized mentor courts for other cities in the country seeking to operate a community court.

Case study
Lakewood Veteran's Treatment Court

The City of Lakewood operates a Veteran's Treatment Court that, since its inception in 2016, has a 0% recidivism rate.

Similar to other therapeutic courts, the Lakewood Veteran's Treatment Court is an alternative to prosecution that emphasizes intervention and recovery, rather than incarceration. Upon successful completion of the program, a veteran will graduate and have their case dismissed.

The Lakewood Veteran's Treatment Court has successfully graduated more than 20 participants who spent 18 to 24 months participating in weekly meetings, random drug testing, and monthly court appearances.

"I am so proud to say that Lakewood's Veteran's Treatment Court is making a difference, and the proof is in the numbers. Out of all of the vet court graduates, not one has returned to the criminal justice system. Zero percent recidivism speaks to the effectiveness of our hands-on, community-centered, and non-adversarial approach."

– Lakewood Municipal Court Judge Lisa Mansfield, who presides over the Veteran's Treatment Court

Conclusion

The criminal justice system is just that—a system. Each component—police, courts, prosecution, public defense, jails, treatment services, and reentry support services—must operate in solid partnership with the others. If any part of the system is lacking or unavailable, the entire system will not function. Similarly, when each component utilizes best practices, we see the greatest possible outcomes for the individuals involved in the criminal justice system and for the community as a whole.

Within this system, public safety and criminal justice issues are continually changing and growing—from increasing crime rates to cities serving as the front line on behavioral health and substance use crises in communities. In the face of these challenges, cities are innovating, adopting best practices, listening to their communities, and working with limited resources to meet the needs of all residents.

Washington cities consistently lead the nation in therapeutic courts, crisis response, and technological innovation. Across the country, communities are reimagining what public safety looks like. Washington cities are primed to lead, with police departments that serve their communities with integrity, a holistic criminal justice approach an evolving response to Washington's growing population. There is more work to be done, and cities are ready to partner with the state to serve our constituents by creating vibrant and safe communities in which to live, learn, work, and play.

To address the vast changes in public safety, criminal justice, and behavioral health, cities need:

1. Additional tools for recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers, including the ability to hire part-time law enforcement work, sufficient capacity for BLEA classes, and financial flexibility to utilize city revenue for public safety needs.

2. Greater state financial support for co-responder and LEAD teams and for misdemeanor-level therapeutic court programs.

3. A robust and accessible statewide network of substance use disorder and behavioral health services and treatment to ensure access to care for all residents at all stages of need, including crisis treatment, inpatient care, and long-term outpatient recovery needs.

References and resources

CHAPTER 1:
Public safety is a top priority for cities

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CHAPTER 3:
Courts and the criminal justice system

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Appendix:

Revenue source	What is it?	What can it be used for?	Which cities are eligible?	Does it require voter approval?
State-shared revenue State-shared revenues are distributed and allocated to cities and towns by a formula, usually set by state statute or determined by the legislature in the state budget process. While some state-shared revenues are influenced by local policies (such as the cannabis excise tax), most are distributed based on population or other factors that are beyond the city's direct control.				
Cannabis excise tax	Quarterly distribution to eligible cities from the State Treasurer's Office.	The stated intent of I-502 is that cannabis legalization would allow "law enforcement resources to be focused on violent and property crimes [and generate] new state and local tax revenue for education, health care, research, and substance abuse prevention."	Cities that do not prohibit cannabis businesses or that have at least one cannabis retailer.	No.
Municipal criminal justice distributions – Population, contracted services, high crime, special programs, and violent crime	Quarterly distribution from the state (separate distributions for: contracted services, high crime, special programs, and violent crime).	Depends on the distribution type.	All cities receive per capita distribution. Some cities receive other distributions based on violent crime rate, etc.	No.
Liquor excise tax	Quarterly distribution from the state to all cities based on population.	At least 20.23% must be used for public safety programs.	Any city.	No.

Revenue source	What is it?	What can it be used for?	Which cities are eligible?	Does it require voter approval?
Local options Cities receive additional revenues from a number of different sources, some charged at the county level and some that cities can choose to implement themselves.				
Criminal justice sales tax	Counties can impose a 0.1% sales tax for criminal justice purposes that they must share with cities on a per capita basis.	Criminal justice purposes.	Any city within a county that imposes the tax.	No.
Gambling tax	Cities that allow gambling may tax the proceeds.	Revenues must be used "primarily for the purpose of public safety."	Any city that allows gambling.	No.
Public safety sales tax - county	Counties can impose up to a 0.3% sales tax that they share with the cities in that county.	At least 1/3 of revenues must be used for criminal justice and/or fire protection purposes. The rest is unrestricted.	Any city within a county that has imposed the sales tax.	No.
Public safety sales tax - city	Sales tax up to 0.1%.	At least 1/3 of revenues must be used for criminal justice and/or fire protection purposes. The remainder is unrestricted.	Any city as long as the county has not already imposed a 0.3% public safety sales tax.	Yes – Simple majority.

Revenue source	What is it?	What can it be used for?	Which cities are eligible?	Does it require voter approval?
Fines and fees Cities generate some revenue from civil penalties, such as traffic or parking infractions, and from criminal misdemeanor fines, such as driving under the influence.				
Traffic fines	State Supreme Court establishes fines for traffic infractions, but revenues are shared with the city where the infraction occurred.	May be used for any government purpose, but a portion must be dedicated to fund local courts.	All.	No.
Limited purpose funds				
Opioid settlements	Settlement dollars from a number of lawsuits with pharmacies and opioid manufacturers and distributors.	Must be used for opioid use abatement purposes set out in the agreements and must be consistent with the state Opioid Response Plan.	Cities over 10,000 that signed on to the Attorney General's settlements.	No.
American Rescue Plan Act – State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds	The federal government provided direct funding to cities across the country to help address the COVID-19 pandemic. Washington cities received roughly $1.2 billion.	Funds were intended to help cities respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Allowable expenses included public safety funding.	All cities that agreed to the terms and conditions of the funding. In Washington, 276 cities accepted funding.	No.

Source: MRSC. *Revenue guide for Washington Cities and Towns.* https://mrsc.org/getmedia/d3f7f211-fc63-4b7a-b362-cb17993d5fe5/Revenue-Guide-For-Washington-Cities-And-Towns.pdf?ext=.pdf.

Association of Washington Cities
1076 Franklin St. SE, Olympia, WA 98501-1346
360.753.4137 | 800.562.8981 | wacities.org

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