

# STATE OF THE COURT

## 2024

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Jennifer Johnson Grant, Presiding Judge

Julie Espinoza, Court Administrator

17425 Ballinger Way NE

Lake Forest Park, WA 98155

206.364.7711

[www.cityofflp.gov](http://www.cityofflp.gov)

## Our Court

Lake Forest Park Municipal Court is a court of limited jurisdiction organized under RCW 3.50. The court has jurisdiction to hear misdemeanor crimes and civil infractions committed within its geographic boundaries.

The court was formed in late 1961. Mayor Francis Holman appointed Charles W. Pomeroy to serve as the court's first judge. Judge Pomeroy's term began on January 16, 1962. The court held evening calendars twice a month. In the early days, Judge Pomeroy ran court from his home and was paid \$35 monthly rent for the use of his home as a court room.

The court has grown over the last six decades. The court is open five days a week with calendars scheduled twice a week. The court and City Council share a beautiful, multi-use room well equipped with audio visual equipment. Criminal cases are heard on Monday and Wednesday mornings. Infractions are heard in a virtual courtroom on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. Post Covid 19, the court has held a hybrid court allowing parties to appear remotely, when appropriate. Armed security ensures the courtroom is a safe space when the doors are open to the public.

Through changes in laws, population, and technology, one thing has remained constant—this court's central role in delivering justice that directly affects the lives of those who live in this community. When municipal courts work well, the entire community benefits—from safer streets to stronger civic engagement. And that is what we are committed to delivering, year after year.

## Our Mission

Dedicated to the fair and impartial administration of justice and equal access for all individuals.  
Committed to serving with respect, competence, and efficiency

## Core Services

With respect to core services, our court handles:

- Misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor cases (theft, criminal trespass, domestic violence (DV), Driving Under the Influence (DUI), Driving While License Suspended (DWLS), etc.)
- Traffic infractions and parking citations, including traffic safety camera enforcement, and
- Vehicle impound hearings.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Presiding Judge: Jennifer Johnson Grant

Court Administrator: Julie Espinoza

Probation Officer: Charles Mitchell

Court Clerks:

- Alisha Bhatti
- Amber Gilmore
- Loyce Weishaar
- Virginia Echeverria

*\*\* The court is currently staffed with 5.9 FTE. In 2024, the court had 4.3 FTE.*

*Presiding Judge* – The presiding judge is appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the City Council for a four-year term. The Presiding Judge is responsible for leading the management and administration of the court’s business, recommending policies and procedures that improve the court’s effectiveness, and allocating resources in a way that maximizes the court’s ability to resolve disputes fairly and expeditiously.

*Court Administrator* – The court administrator (CA) is responsible for all non-judicial, day-to-day operations of the court, including court services. The CA develops and implements policies and procedures, the court budget, oversees personnel management and development, accounting, and case flow management. The CA works under the direction of the presiding judge.

*Probation Officer* – The probation officer (PO) monitors the behavior of individuals sentenced to active conditions mandated by the court. The PO monitors compliance through direct communication with the probationer and treatment providers. The PO works under the supervision of the presiding judge and CA.

*Court Clerk* – The clerk provides assistance to the public regarding court dates and fines, maintains accurate data entry in all court software, and supports court operational and reporting requirements. Court clerks work under the supervision of the CA. Duties encompass:

- Courtroom Hearings
- Court Reception/ Customer Service
- Jury Management
- Case Scheduling
- Cashiering

## 2024 IN REVIEW

### STAFFING UPDATES

Alisha Bhatti – Court Clerk. The court welcomed Alisha in June of 2024. Alisha has a BA in Criminal Justice and is pursuing a master's degree in criminal justice at Seattle University. Alisha has been a great addition to the LFPMC team.

Temporary Staffing/Per Diem – Kelley Gradwohl and Dillion Spiess provided per diem staffing to assist with backlog and coverage. Ms. Gradwohl also played an important role providing continuity and training assistance during Ms. Bhatti's training.

### MEMBERSHIPS & TRAININGS

The Court is actively involved in the following organizations:

- District and Municipal Court Judges' Association (DMCJA)
- District and Municipal Court Management Association (DMCMA)
- Municipal Judges Breakout Room (MJBR)
- Trial Court Coordination Council (TCCC)

Judge Grant and Court Administrator Julie Espinoza attended the Better Together Leadership Forum for presiding judges and administrators held in Vancouver, WA. They also attended the CLJ CMS Informational Session, Marysville, WA.

Judge Grant attended the DMCJA Spring Program, Marysville, WA. Ms. Espinoza attend the DMCMA Spring Program, Spokane, WA, as well as the following NACM/ICM Certification Courses:

- Certified Court Manager (completed)
- Certified Court Executive (in progress)

### LANGUAGE ACCESS INTERPRETER

#### REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM (LAIRP)

Lake Forest Park Municipal Court was invited to participate in the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) established interpreter reimbursement program due in part to the Court's active participation and compliance with King County's Language Access Plan (LAP). The Court can offset the cost of providing not only certified court interpreters at a 50% reimbursement rate, but also full reimbursement of approved goods and services. In 2024 the court purchased a translation device called Pocketalk for use at the front counter. The device, the size of a small smart phone, can translate in over 82 languages. The court was reimbursed in full for that purchase and received total reimbursement of \$3,925 from LAIRP in 2024.

The program furthers our efforts to provide access to justice in our Court and in providing language services outside of the courtroom.

## JAIL FACILITIES & IN CUSTODY HEARINGS

Lake Forest Park Municipal Court inmates may be housed at the Snohomish County Jail (SCJ), the King County Jail (KCJ), Lynnwood Jail (LCJC), and Sunnyside Jail.

Arrests on new charges are typically booked at SCJ. Offenders arrested on outstanding LFPMC warrants may be booked into the KCJ or SCJ. Sunnyside Jail continued to be a more economical facility for defendants serving lengthier jail sentences.

In 2024, LFP entered an interlocal agreement with Lynnwood for jail and video court services. The newly built Lynnwood Jail contains two courtrooms equipped with a video court. This facility does not yet serve female inmates; however, Lynnwood is the preferred facility because it is physically closer, booking process is more efficient, and video court appearances alleviate the need to transport a defendant for a hearing at the courthouse. The agreement and coordination occurred in 2024 with the first LFP booking in January 2025.

### In Custody Hearings, Transport & Security

The Lake Forest Park Police Support Officer Christian Hansen provides dedicated transport services for in custody defendants held at SCJ or KCJ. Officer Hansen transports individuals for hearings and facilitates movement of the defendant throughout LFP city hall.

In custody defendants are transported to city hall for a Zoom hearing. Once at city hall the in custody defendant is secured in a holding cells. Their video hearing in the LFPPD's secure interrogation room. Defendant is able to meet with their attorney privately before appearing remotely via Zoom.

Retired LFP Police Officer Greg Ward provides security for in-person hearings at LFPMC. He cordons off the area outside the courtroom doors and screens people for weapons before they enter the courtroom. When LFPPD is unavailable to staff the security detail, the court utilizes PSES for security services.

## AOC JIS OUTAGE REIMBURSEMENT

Administrative Office of the Courts reimbursed courts for costs incurred responding to the two-week statewide judicial information system outage. The LFPMC documented 330.29 judicial and clerk hours expended in an effort to catch up on backlog. AOC reimbursed the Court for all 330 hours logged by staff and submitted for reimbursement. The court applied for and received \$13,869.61.

## YOUTH COURT

Lake Forest Park Municipal Court created a Youth Court program in 2001. Our Youth Court was one of the first in state and was operated collaboratively with Shoreline District Court. Sixteen and seventeen-year-old traffic offenders are able to divert their cases to Youth Court where student volunteers serve as the judge, bailiff, or jury members.

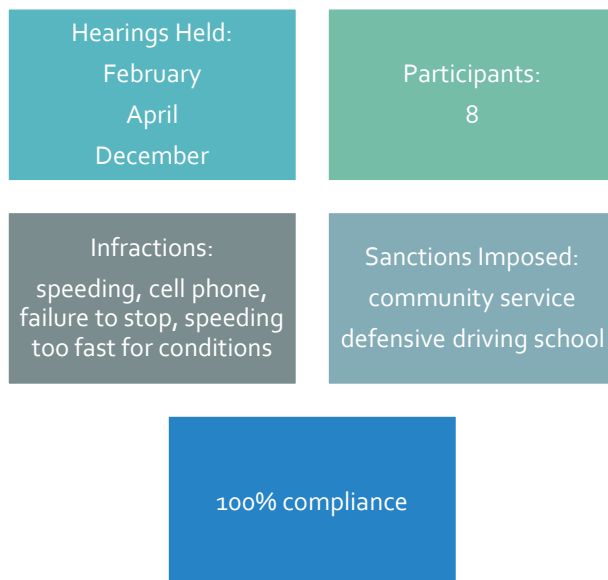
Participants who enter Youth Court take responsibility for the alleged infraction and cannot challenge the violation at their Youth Court hearing. Participants opting in to the program agree to maintain law abiding behavior for six months and to comply with the "sentence" handed down by the court. At a

typical Youth Court hearing, the participant can explain the circumstances surrounding the event and respond to questions from the Youth Court judge and jury. The Youth Court jury deliberates and imposes a constructive sentence. Students typically have two months to complete the terms of their sentence. A constructive Youth Court sentence may order a sanction of community service hours, an essay/research paper, a letter of apology, a required defensive driving course, or another option, as determined by the jury.

If a student receives a ticket within this period, the infraction is found committed, and the full fine is imposed. If the sentence is successfully completed and the infraction is dismissed and not reported on the student's driving record.

Although Shoreline District Court has not partnered with LFP for a few years, our Youth Court has continued to function well with student from Shorecrest High School who are trained and supervised by Bo Jordan, the Youth Court Staff Advisor. The court is very thankful for Bo Jordan for his continued service.

### Youth Court 2024, in Summary



## CHALLENGES FACED IN 2024

### INVALID 24/7 INFRACTIONS:

On October 7, 2024, Court administration discovered error in infraction language resulting in the dismissal and refund of payment by the Court of 3,223 infractions.

### JIS SHUTDOWN NOVEMBER 3-17, 2024:

AOC shut down the judicial information system (JIS) on November 3, 2024 after “unauthorized activity” was detected. Nearly all courts utilize JIS or access information stored in JIS. This was an unprecedented action that brought most courts to a halt.

There was not advance warning of shut down and AOC was unable to communicate directly with Washington courts because AOC lost access to the listservs used to communicate with the presiding judges and court administrators. Information was hard to come by initially. Word was slowly spread from court to court. Court administrators and presiding judges strategized with their colleagues in other courts on how to proceed without access to calendars, criminal history, or updated court records.

Various workarounds were devised, and copious notes were taken of every action, including phone calls and counter visits. Court calendars were assembled manually. Paper records were maintained until information could be entered into JIS once restored. The court issued an emergency order, authorized by the Chief Justice Gonzalez of the Washington Supreme Court, suspending enforcement of specific court rules until the JIS functionality returned.

JIS was restored on November 15, 2024. Courts were provided updated security protocols and allowed access on November 18, 2025. Full functionality, including the ability to run necessary Business Intelligence Tool (BIT) reports, was not restored until December 30, 2024.

The real work started once JIS was back online. Calendars were busier than ever due to continued hearings. Courts had to deal with busy calendars while systematically docketing the activity taken during the outage and processing financial transactions. The LFPMC team did an excellent job! They worked hard and maintained a positive attitude.

**\*\*Court staff tracked a total of 330 hours devoted to backlog recovering from the JIS outage.**

### POWER OUTAGE:

Lake Forest Park was without power from November 20 – 22, 2024 due to a severe windstorm. City Hall and the Court closed. Twenty-nine cases calendared for Wednesday, November 20<sup>th</sup> were reset to future dates.

The outage and inability to work happened just days after JIS was restored. A generator provided power to some areas of City Hall but not in the LFPMC court office space. Staff went above and beyond squatting in various offices throughout the building so they could plug in and work.

## PHOTO ENFORCEMENT EXPANDED

Much of 2024 was spent dealing with photo enforcement.

The legislature amended and recodified the laws governing photo enforcement in RCW 46.63.220. Significantly, the legislature placed a cap on the maximum penalties permitted and dictated where those penalties could be allocated. The changes presented a number of challenges for the court as the Notice of Infractions needed to be updated with the new code and approved by AOC.

Mayor French emphasized the importance of pedestrian safety and, with City Council approval, speeding near Brookside Elementary was prioritized. Photo enforcement was expanded to include 24-hour enforcement of the posted speed limit on NE 178th.

### Hybrid Camera Onboarding:

Court administration underwent an approximate six-month onboarding process to implement the 24/7 hybrid camera system. The onboarding encompassed a series of meetings with AOC and VERRA as well as coordinated efforts with City departments to launch the program. The extra efforts and time required to review workflow, execute case management testing, facilitate contract and citation approval presented additional staffing challenges for the Court.

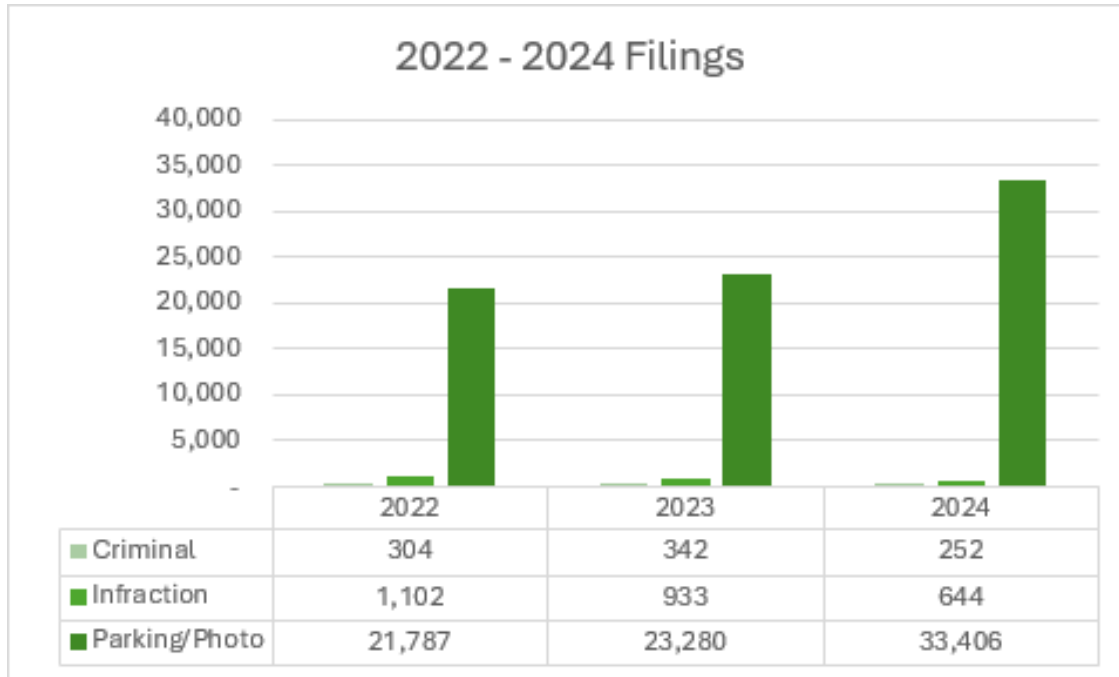
### 24/7 Photo Enforcement:

September 16, 2024 - Hybrid photo enforcement system was go-live tripling the number of infractions filed (from 1,555 to 4,893 per month) and doubling the amount of hearing requests received by the Court.

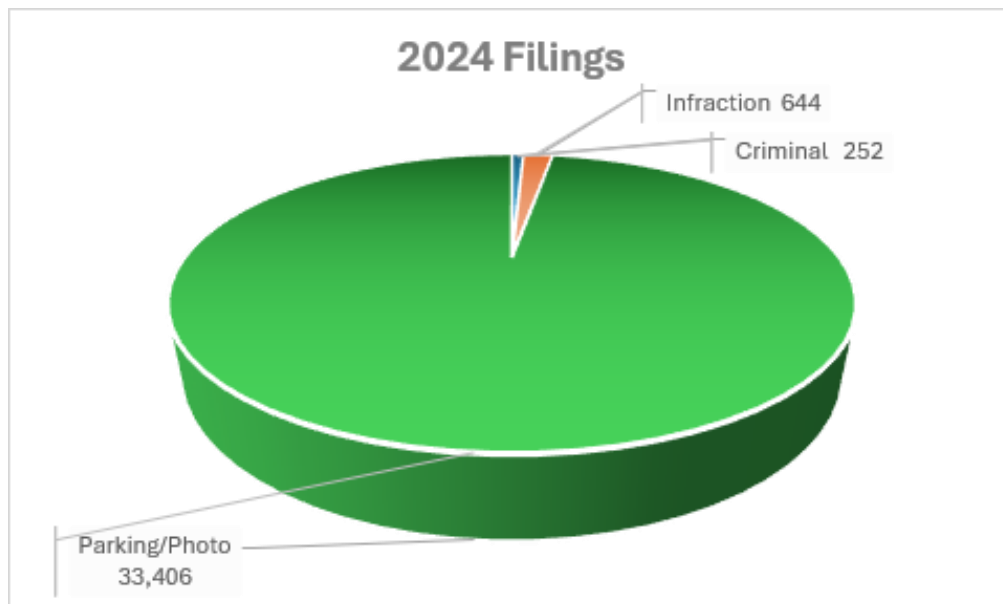


## FILINGS & HEARINGS

### HISTORICAL FILINGS 2022-2024

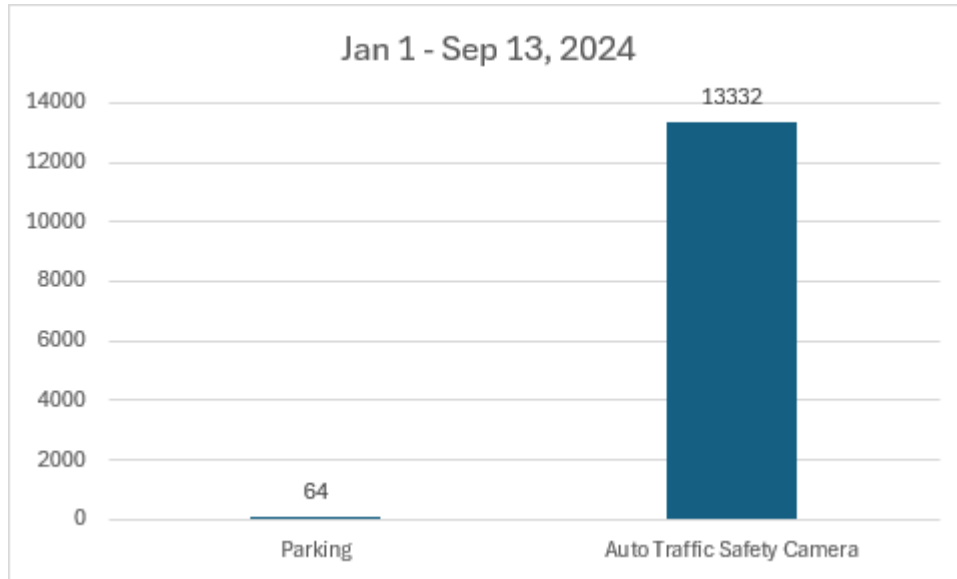


### CASES FILED IN 2024

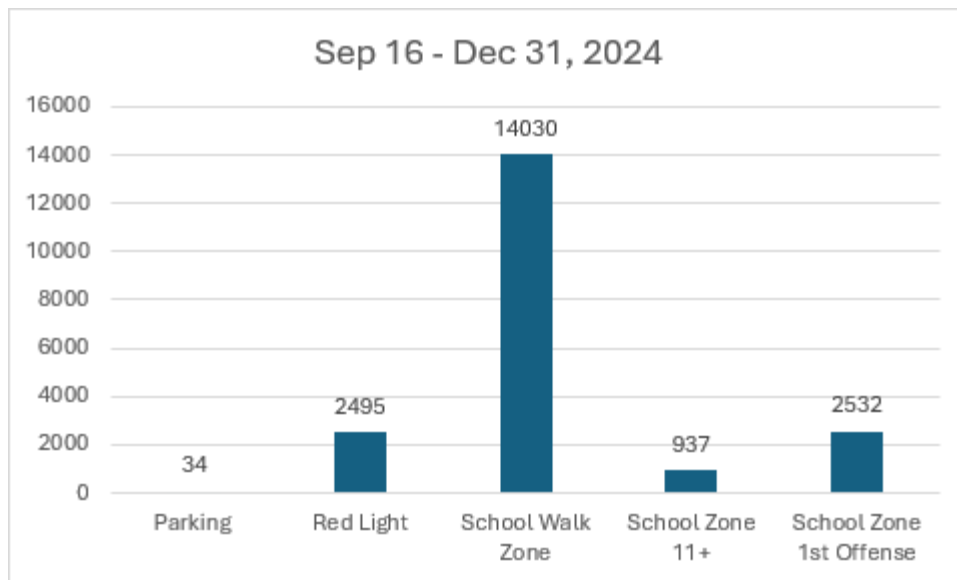


## IMPACT OF THE 24/7 WALK ZONE ENFORCEMENT

Prior to the go live date, the court received 13,332 photo citations.



After the go live date, in just three and a half months, the court received 19,994 photo citations, including 14,030 for speeding in School Walk Zone photo citations.



**Types of cases defined:**

Traffic Infractions - Cases that pertain to (1) the operation or condition of a vehicle whether it is moving, standing, or stopping, and (2) pedestrian offenses.

Non-Traffic Infractions - Cases including civil violations of RCW 18.27.340 and 18.106.020, land use license violations, and offenses decriminalized under municipal code, such as dog leash violations and bicycle offenses.

Parking Infractions - Cases pertaining only to violations of parking statutes and ordinances. Includes photo enforcement infractions.

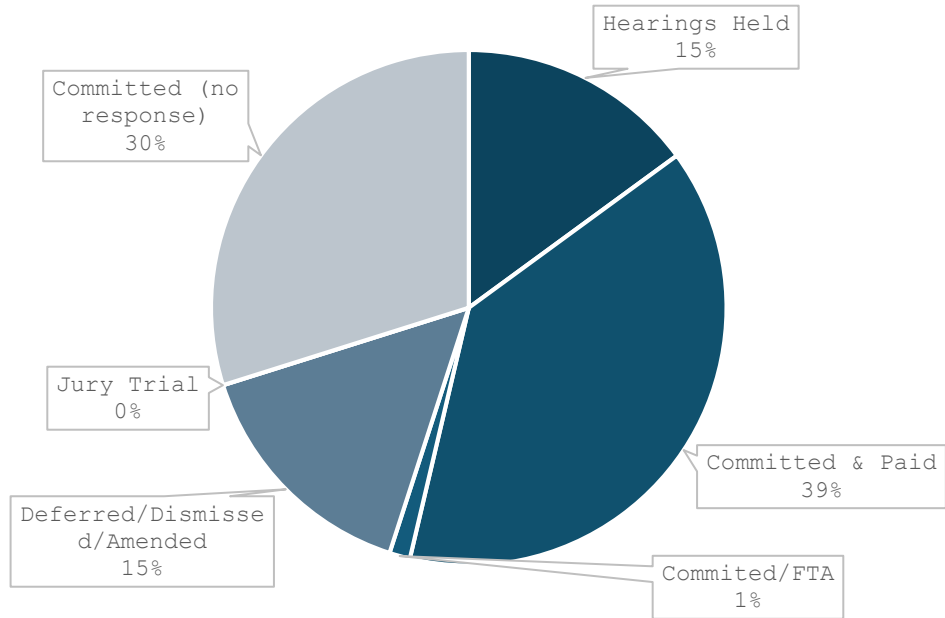
Driving Under the Influence - Cases that cite RCW 46.61.502, driving while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs, or RCW 46.61.504, actual physical control of a motor vehicle while under the influence of intoxicating liquor or drugs.

Criminal (Traffic) - All citations and complaints other than those counted under DUI or Physical Control, that pertain to the operation or use of a vehicle.

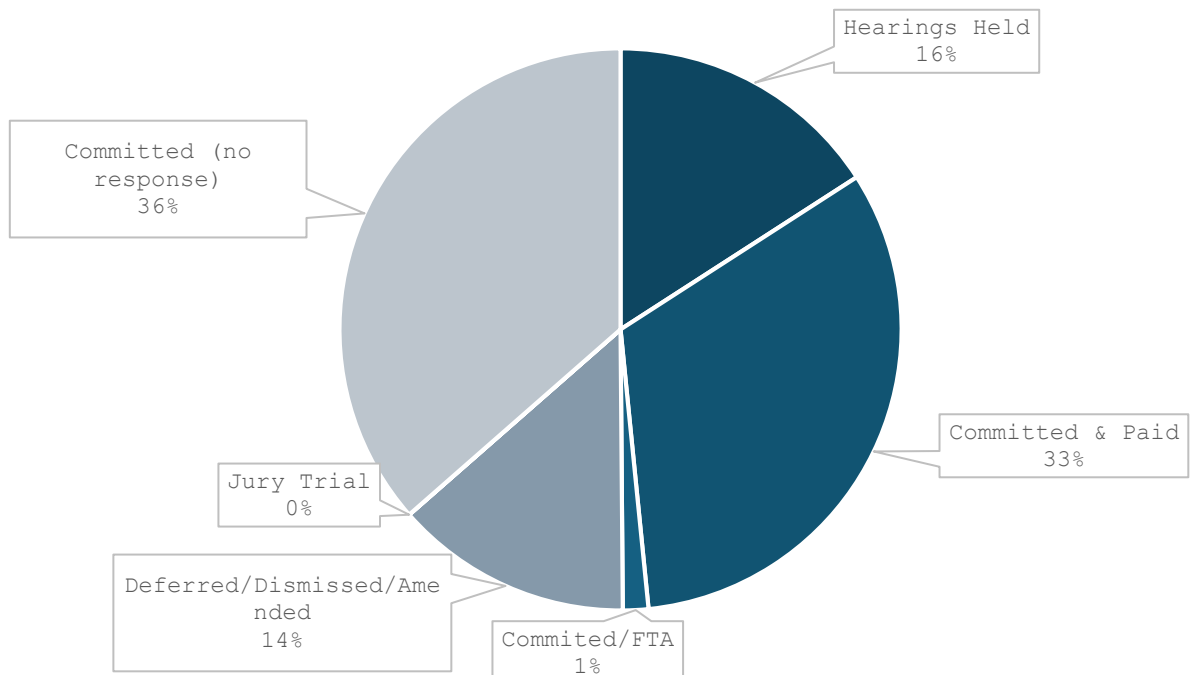
Criminal (Non-Traffic) - Criminal cases, excluding DUI and Physical Control, Other Traffic Misdemeanors, punishable by up to one year in jail and/or a fine of up to \$5000.

## HEARINGS HELD

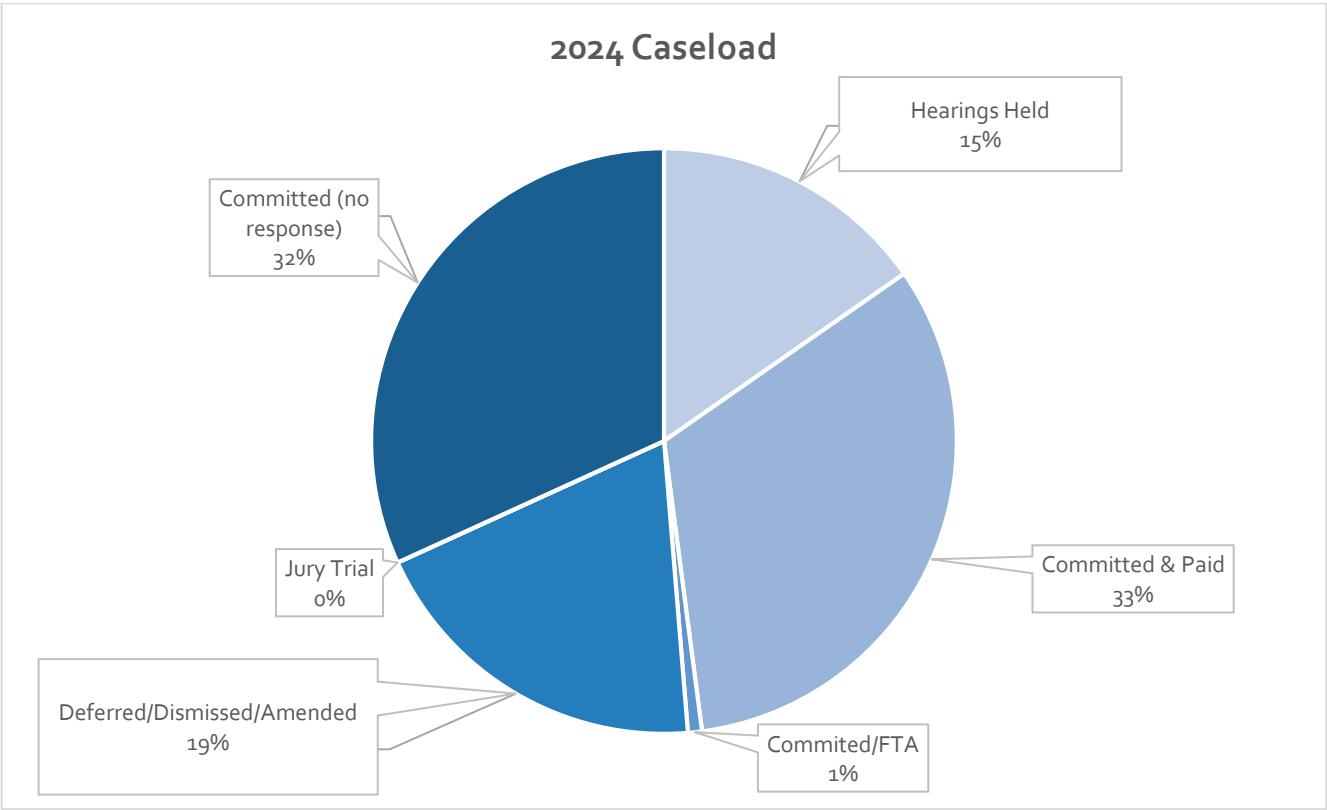
2022 Caseload



2023 Caseload



The Court heard one DUI jury trial in 2023



The Court heard one DV jury trial in 2024

## LOOKING AHEAD

### GROWING CASELOADS

The court anticipates increased infractions and criminal traffic filings as LFPPD becomes fulling staffed and able to dedicate more attention to traffic patrol. The court is currently working beyond capacity and the filing numbers support adding another clerk. Any additional cameras will increase staffing needs, including judicial time. The court will explore appointing a commissioner to assist with the photo enforcement hearings as the standing need exceeds a pro tem assignment. RCW 3.50.075. Adding staff is a challenge when the court workspace is limited.

### CLJ-CMS ROLL OUT IN 2026

AOC is rolling out the CLJ CMS operating system. LFPMC is scheduled for June 2026. This will be a major adjustment as we prepare for the new system. We should have a leg up if we are able to start converting our paper files into a digital format with Laserfiche.

The roll out will require the court to close out and shut down on Wednesday, May 28, 2026 until we go live in the new system on Sunday, June 1, 2026. All court staff and IT are necessary for the Sunday launch. Change can be uncomfortable, but the new systems will provide e-filing and e-supervision. This will require OT and will have a budgetary impact.

### INDIGENT DEFENSE

Public Defense caseloads. The Washington State Supreme Court lowered indigent defense caseloads. Cities have some autonomy but annual reductions are expected with a ten-year deadline to meet standards. The City contracts with Stewart MacNichols Harmell for defense services. They provide two attorneys to staff our criminal calendars. Those same attorneys appear in other jurisdictions as well. How calendars translate to caseloads will need to be explored. This is a question for the executive branch. In 2024, 335 defendants appeared with 276 represented by the public defender or conflict counsel.

Lack of Conflict Counsel. There is a shortage of indigent defense attorneys who are taking conflict cases. In the past LFP had three attorneys in the rotation; however, we are now down to just one. He has been able to handle nearly all conflict matters but we run into issues when he also has a conflict with the potential client. This has occurred several times in recent years and is very problematic. The city administrator posted the position, but the search was not fruitful. This is ongoing issue that needs to be addressed.