

The background image shows the exterior of the Seattle Municipal Court building, featuring a modern design with large glass windows and columns. The text is overlaid on this image with a semi-transparent green filter.

# SEATTLE MUNICIPAL COURT Probation Evolution 2022 Update

Willie Gregory, Presiding Judge  
Carol Bell, Programs & Services Manager

April 2022



# Seattle Municipal Court Overview

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**Mission:** Provide a forum to resolve alleged violations of the law in a respectful, independent and impartial manner

- Judicial branch of City government
- Handles all misdemeanor/gross misdemeanor crimes and civil infractions under the Seattle Municipal Code and certain RCW Statutes
- Processes thousands of criminal cases and hundreds of thousands of vehicle infractions every year

# Organizational Values

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SERVICE



FAIRNESS



EQUITY AND  
INCLUSION



EXCELLENCE



INNOVATION



INTEGRITY

# What is Probation at SMC?

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- Post-adjudication case management
- Judges order obligations at sentencing
  - Ex: substance use disorder treatment, domestic violence intervention, mental health treatment and case management
- Probation counselors support clients to complete obligations
- Goals: supporting client's success on probation, accomplishment of individualized goals, and transition out of the criminal legal system



# Why Probation Evolution

## Project Goal

“Transform our Programs and Services division by stepping away from traditional incarcerative, reactionary approaches to misdemeanant supervision, toward one that is **hopeful, equitable, and supportive of client success and growth.**”

## Program Assessments

- **The Vera Institute of Justice:** *Report to Seattle Municipal Court Probation Services on Strategies for Improving Policies and Practices* (2020)
- **Seattle Office of the City Auditor:** *Assessment of Seattle Municipal Court Probation Racial and Ethnic Proportionality* (2021)

[Seattle.gov/courts/probation/evolution](https://seattle.gov/courts/probation/evolution)

# What's Changed?

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**Focused on high-risk case types.** Most clients on probation are referred for DUI, DV or Mental Health Court.

**Discontinued practice of criminal record checks** on clients not referred to probation/clients no longer obligated to conditions of probation (except in some DUI cases where required). As of early 2021, resulted in 1,640 fewer cases on records checks

**Eliminated discretionary probation fees** in September 2020

**Implemented a case closure policy** directing counselors to administratively remove clients from probation when court-ordered conditions are met. After policy was implemented, # of clients on active supervision by reduced by 16%

Began collecting **client-reported race and ethnicity data** to better understand outcomes for different groups and address disproportionate impacts

Implemented a **client exit survey**

# 2022 So Far

- ✓ Hired Probation Evolution Project Manager/Organizational Change Manager
- ✓ Developed project schedule for completing all Probation Evolution tasks by end of Q2 2023
- ✓ Arranged division wide training on Trauma Responsive Care, Harm Reduction and Motivational Interviewing (Coming in June and July 2022)
- ✓ Implemented Presiding Judge Gregory's decision to eliminate use of risk assessment tools for determining a probation client's reporting frequency
- ✓ Hired Community Outreach and Engagement Strategic Advisor
- ✓ Welcomed Community Resource Center Systems Navigator



# Eliminated Risk Assessment Tools in Probation

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- Effective March 21, 2022, Probation Services eliminated use of risk assessment tools
- Risk assessment tools are used to avoid human bias, however, tools often include questions that perpetuate bias towards people of color
- Previous tool was found to be failing to differentiate between risk levels
  - Classifying 93 percent of people under SMC probation supervision as posing high risk
  - Had especially adverse effects on Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native clients





# Developing New Classification System

Interim policy: all new probation clients required to report once per month (currently by phone/video)

Now working to develop standardized classification system, as required by State Court Rule ARLJ 11.2

- Developing in partnership with community members and system partners
- Racial Equity Toolkit will be completed as part of the system design process

Target date for new classification system:  
**June 2022**

# What is our project plan?



## Now

Engage the community to design a new classification system.

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Uncover and mitigate unintended impacts to at risk communities with a RET.

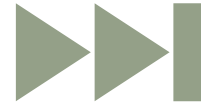
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Modify in-take policies, processes, internal controls, & tools for the classification system.

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Train staff on implicit bias and the new classification system.

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## Next

Engage community to design meaningful, fair, and impartial client interaction expectations.

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Change supervision so that accomplishments inform the frequency and type of contact.

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Uncover and mitigate unintended impacts on at risk communities with a RET.

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Modify policies, processes, internal controls, & tools with the updated supervision model.

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Train staff on client interactions expectations and the updated supervision model.

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## Later

Engage community to design positive reinforcement and incentives to encourage clients to achieve prosocial goals.

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Change supervision so that accomplishments inform the duration of probation.

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Uncover and mitigate unintended impacts on at risk communities with a RET.

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Modify policies, processes, internal controls, & tools with the updated supervision model.

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Train staff on prosocial activity interactions and the updated supervision model.

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# Questions