

County Clerk's Office White Paper

For 145 years the Citizens of Snohomish County have trusted the care of their court records to an elected County Clerk. The Clerk's Office serves as the public's portal into the local Superior Court justice system. It is administrative in nature and is governed by numerous state statutes and rules.

The elected Clerk is accountable to the citizenry and is responsible for performing the duties of the Office, effectively and efficiently while providing quality customer service to everyone.

Effective in Performing Everyday Tasks:

- Serving 91,000 walk-in customers (2003 - does not include judges)
- Answering 60,000 phone calls (2005)
- Processing 41,000 pieces of mail (2005)
- Creating 29,000 new court files (2005)
- Summoning 46,000 jurors for Superior & District Courts (2005)
- Processing 83,000 payments (2005)
- Managing \$20.6 million in money received (2005)
- Managing over 100,000 case exhibits (all)
- Serving 12,000 domestic violence contacts

Snohomish County represents 10% of all Superior Court activity in the state of Washington. During Clerk Pam Daniels tenure there have been no "findings" issued by the State Auditor (the State Auditor performs annual audits on the Clerk's Office).

Efficient in Doing Business:

Key workload indicators continue to increase. Between 1998 - 2004 these indicators **increased** an average of **25.7%** while **staffing levels remained the same**. These increases have required the Office to review and streamline internal business processes to meet performance expectations. Said another way, the Office was required to work 25.7% more efficiently in 2004 than in 1998.

Business re-engineering impacts:

- Reduced the amount of time involved in shelving and re-shelving cases
- Reduced time involved in distributing information to outside agencies
- Reduced costs related to summoning jurors for Superior & District Courts
- Reduced the amount of time involved in copying and retrieving files
- Reduced the time involved in locating cases and documents
- Reduced the time required to get a document into a file from 8-to-2 days
- Implemented an electronic digitizing system that makes records available to multiple users (simultaneously)

- Reduced internal management positions by 25%
- Reduced time involved in getting information from the Clerk's Office to: Prosecutor staff, Sheriff & Corrections officers, Court Administration, Judges, Law Clerks, Family Services, Juvenile Court staff, and Office of Public Defense.

Customer Service Improvements:

- Expanded public office hours
- Expanded services to domestic violence victims
- Expanded services to self-represented customers
- Provided remote access to records for the local Law & Justice community
- Developed a program to hold offenders accountable for paying their court ordered obligations to victims of crime, fines and fees
- Created thousands of security files to protect personal data (identity theft)
- Implemented imaging system to provide "higher levels" of service to courts & public

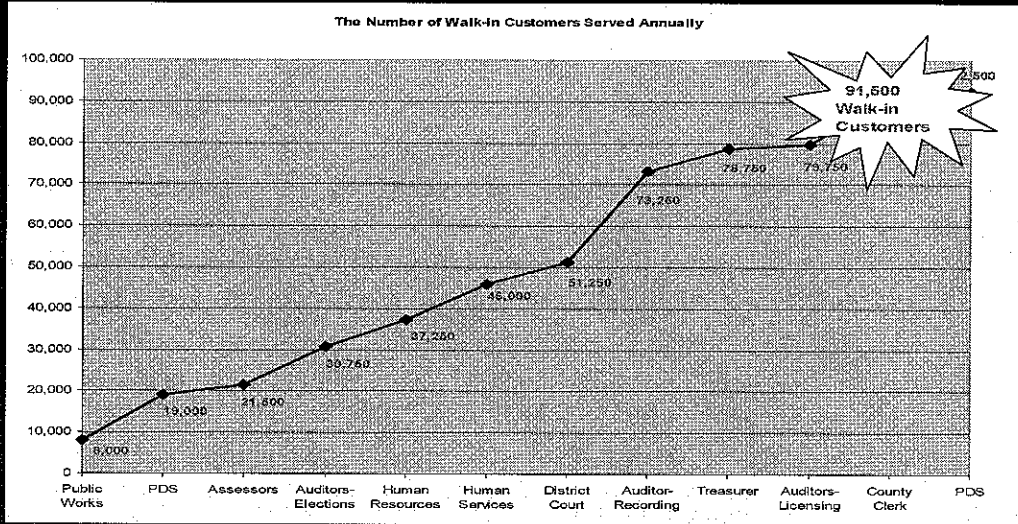
Surveys indicate 86.2% of our walk-in customers rate our service as "Outstanding"; 9.9% "Good"; 2.7% "Average"; 1% "Poor."

Points to consider when evaluating the issue of electing or appointing the County Clerk!

- Elected Clerks are given the freedom to provide un-tethered leadership and lobby for the best interest of all customers – this focus is uniquely different from that of judges.
- The proposed structure of an appointed Clerk would create two additional tiers of bureaucratic oversight in managing the Office (court administrator & judges).
- Elected Clerks have the freedom to make policy decisions regarding operations of the Office.
- The Clerk's Office has made the local court system more efficient using technology (digitizing court documents).
- An elected Clerk interacts with litigants & persons unhappy with judges and judicial decisions without fear of reprisal.
- There is no evidence that shows appointed offices perform mandated duties more effectively, more efficiently or more economically.
- Appointing any official removes the right of the **people** to have a say, and removes accountability to the **people**.
- Elected Clerks provide integrity in the care of the **people's** court records, monies and accounts by being removed from the control and oversight of the persons (judges) directly involved in the process. The state and federal constitutions were set out to assure that power and control of money and records was never vested in just one office.
- Elected Clerks have the freedom to actively seek solutions and make policy in dealing with issues at all levels (including Olympia).

Miscellaneous

Walk-in Customers



ASSIGNED COUNSEL
PUBLIC DEFENDER

PROBATION

SUPERIOR COURT
(INCLUDING
JUVENILE COURT)

GUARDIAN
AD LITEM

PROSECUTOR

DOC

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

WSSR/OSE

CLERK'S OFFICE
WORKLOAD DRIVERS

LEGISLATURE
COURT RULES
(State & Local)

CLERK'S OFFICE

DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

LAW ENFORCEMENT
(WSP/SHERIFF/POLICE)

BAR ASSOCIATION
(ATTORNEYS)

DISTRICT
COURT

FAMILY COURT
(INCLUDING UNIFIED
FAMILY COURT)

OAC

DSHS

MENTAL
HEALTH

EMPLOYMENT
SECURITY

PUBLIC
(INCLUDING
TITLE CO'S. & MEDIA)

PRO SE
LITIGANTS

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNTY CLERK?

The County Clerk is an elected official located in the executive branch of government. The functions of the County Clerk are to serve citizens involved with the Snohomish County Superior Court and support the Superior Court System. The Clerk is also the ex-officio Clerk of the Superior Court. In keeping with our country's common law tradition, and intricately woven into the system of checks and balances of our governmental structure, the Clerk is charged with:

- making a record of all documents filed, proceedings held and decisions rendered in superior court cases;
- maintaining and providing public access to superior court records; establishing calendars for court proceedings;
- registering witnesses, summoning jurors and safeguarding all exhibits admitted at trial;
- receipting and disbursing all fees, fines and settlements in superior court cases.

Special programs of the Clerk's Office include the FAMILY LAW FACILITATOR PROGRAM and the DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROTECTION ORDER PROGRAM assisting citizens through the Superior Court System.



THE CLERK'S OFFICE MAINTAINS RECORDS AND LIMITED INFORMATION REGARDING THE FOLLOWING:

- ◆ At Risk Youth/Child in Need of Services*
- ◆ Adoptions
- ◆ Appeals to the Court of Appeals and/or Supreme Court
- ◆ Appeals from courts of limited jurisdiction
- ◆ Civil lawsuits
- ◆ Confirmation of a court matter
- ◆ Criminal restitution payments
- ◆ Criminal witness sign-in
- ◆ Dependancies*
- ◆ Divorce matters
- ◆ Domestic violence
- ◆ Emancipations*
- ◆ Family Law Facilitator
- ◆ Filed Superior Court documents
- ◆ Guardianships
- ◆ Jury duty (5th floor Courthouse)
- ◆ Juvenile offender matters*
- ◆ Judgments in Superior Court
- ◆ Legal records research
- ◆ Paternity issues
- ◆ Probates/Wills (form K's, letters)
- ◆ Refunding bail
- ◆ Superior Court files and exhibits

*These matters are handled at the Denny Juvenile Justice Center.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE VISITING OR CALLING THE CLERK'S OFFICE

- ◆ **LEGAL ADVICE** - Per RCW 2.32.050, and 2.32.090 the Clerk's Office is prohibited from giving legal advice. If you need legal advice or have questions about the application of the law in a particular matter, you should consult an attorney.
- ◆ **PAYMENTS** - The Clerk's Office accepts cash, money orders and cashier's checks. **PERSONAL CHECKS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.**
- ◆ **FILE ACCESS** - To obtain access to a file to review or make copies of documents, a valid photo I.D. is required (e.g., driver's license, passport, etc.).
- ◆ **FORMS** - You may purchase the following form packets from the Clerk's Office:
 - Family Law forms
 - Emancipation forms
 Other legal forms may be available at office supply stores and/or the Snohomish County Law Library (1st floor Courthouse).
- ◆ **COPYING FEES** - Copies may be made of documents from either a file or microfilm as follows:
 - regular copies - fifteen cents per page
 - certified copies - \$2.00 for the first page and \$1.00 for each additional page thereafter for each document
 Please note that our copying fees are mandated by RCW 42.17.300 and 36.18.020(b).