

INCARCERATION PREVENTION AND REDUCTION

TASK FORCE

Transforming Criminal Justice and Public Safety in Whatcom
County.



2025 Annual Report and Justice Project Implementation Plan Progress Report

June 16, 2025

Prepared by



**CROSSROADS
CONSULTING**

TASK FORCE MEMBERS AS OF JUNE 2025

Tami Bennett

Bellingham Municipal Court

Barry Buchanan

Whatcom County Council

Malora Christensen

Response Systems Division, Health and Community Services

Eric Davidson

Blaine City Council

Donia Edwards

Education Dept. Director, Nooksack Tribe

Arlene Feld

Marriage & Family Therapist (Retired)

Heather Flaherty

Co-Chair, Citizen Representative

Peter Frazier

Co-Chair, Citizen Representative

Rodger Funk

Police Chief, City of Blaine

Alexis Hahs

Program Director, Lifeline Connections

Daniel Hammill

Bellingham City Council Member

Deborah Hawley

Consumer Representative

Mike Hilley

EMS Manager, Whatcom County

Rosa Hunter

Consumer Representative

Evan Jones

Superior Court Judge

Raylene King

Whatcom County Superior Court Clerk

Scott Korthuis

Mayor, City of Lynden

Tracy Kruse

Blaine Municipal Court

Jenn Lockwood

Associate Executive Director, Brigid Collins

Kim Lund

Mayor, City of Bellingham

Rebecca Mertzig

Police Chief, City of Bellingham

Eric Petersen

Field Administrator, State Dept. of Corrections

Eric Richey

Whatcom County Prosecuting Attorney

Berdi Safford

Physician (Retired)

Satpal Sidhu/Kayla Schott-Bresler

Whatcom County Executive (Representative)

Donnell "Tank" Tanksley

Whatcom County Sheriff

Jake Wiebusch

Whatcom County District Court

Maia Vanyo

Chief Deputy, Whatcom County Public Defender's Office

COMMITTEES

Task Force Committees may include Task Force members, their proxies, or other agency staff or community members.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COMMITTEE

Danny Carroll

Malora Christensen

Alexis Hahs

Amy Hockenberry

Brian Estes

Arlene Feld

Hannah Fisk

Heather Flaherty

Stephen Gockley

Daniel Hammill

Steve Harris

Deborah Hawley

Mike Hilley

Amy Hockenberry

Pam Jacobs

Cedric Johnson

Steve Larsen

Debra Lev

Kyle Nelson

Tory Sandoz

Steven Traff

Maia Vanyo

Chao-ying Wu

CRISIS STABILIZATION COMMITTEE (SUNSETTED MAY 2025)

Linda Crothers

Todd Donovan

Megan Drake

Steve Harris

Mike Hilley

Maia Vanyo

INFORMATION NEEDS AND DATA EXCHANGE (INDEX) COMMITTEE

Ryan Anderson

Lynette Bennett

Amy Ebnal

Caleb Erickson

Heather Flaherty

Jeremy Morton

Perry Rice

Berdi Safford

Donnell "Tank" Tanksley

Jake Wiebusch

Maia Vanyo

JUSTICE PROJECT OVERSIGHT AND PLANNING (JPOP) COMMITTEE

Trevor Aerts

Barry Buchanan

Heather Flaherty

Starck Follis

Peter Frazier / Heather Flaherty

Richard Gleason

Daniel Hammill

Pamela Kahn

Miriam Karamoko

Parneet Kaur

Kim Lund / Jason Korneliussen

Eric Richey

Amber Rucker

Scott Ryckman

Satpal Sidhu

Hannah Sloan

Mary Lou Steward

Robert Sullivan

Roman Swanaset Simmonds

Donnell "Tank" Tanksley

Tawsha Thompson

LEGAL AND JUSTICE SYSTEMS COMMITTEE

Tami Bennett

Heather Flaherty

Starck Follis

Stephen Gockley

Evan Jones

Wendy Jones

Raylene King

Stephanie Kraft

Eric Peterson

Eric Richey

Berdi Safford

Donnell "Tank" Tanksley

Maia Vanyo

Jake Wiebusch

STEERING COMMITTEE

Barry Buchanan

Heather Flaherty

Peter Frazier

Stephen Gockley

Daniel Hammill

Raylene King

Berdi Safford

Satpal Sidhu

Hannah Sloan

Tawsha Thompson

Note: See page 11 for list of Task Force Workgroups and their members.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Background	4
About This Report.....	5
2025 Annual Report and Justice Project Implementation Plan Progress Report.....	7
Background	7
Report Overview.....	8
I. 2025 IPRTF Annual Report	9
Topics Before the Task Force	9
Task Force Organizational Development.....	9
Task Force Action Plan Alignment with Justice Project Implementation Plan Priorities.....	12
Communications and Transparency.....	14
Legislative Priorities.....	14
II. Justice Project Implementation Plan Progress Report.....	17
Overview.....	17
Steps Taken and Progress Made Toward the Goals of the Implementation Plan.....	17
Strategy I: Ensure Oversight, Accountability, and Transparency.....	18
Strategy II: Increase Access to Behavioral Health Services.....	21
Strategy III: Build Facilities Needed to Promote Public Health, Safety, and Justice	22
Strategy IV: Expand the Capacity of Programs to Reduce Incarceration/Re-incarceration.....	24
Strategy V: Make Systems Changes with Local, Regional, State, and Federal Partners.....	25
Other community initiatives undertaken to prevent involvement in the criminal legal system:	27
Resources Needed to Further Meet Goals	27
Funding Received	27
Potential Needs for Additional Funding	27
Looking Ahead	27
Appendix	29
APPENDIX A: Roles of Entities Monitoring the Justice Project per Ordinance 2023-039 and the Justice Project Implementation Plan	30

Executive Summary

Background

Over the past decade, the [Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force](#) (hereafter referred to as the IPRTF or Task Force) has led efforts to reduce incarceration rates and prevent reincarceration in Whatcom County by providing research, analysis, and recommendations grounded in best practice. The Task Force was formed by an ordinance of the Whatcom County Council in 2015 to review Whatcom County's criminal legal and behavioral health programs, recommend changes to reduce incarceration of individuals struggling with mental illness and substance use, and to reduce jail use by pretrial defendants who can be safely released. The Task Force also serves as the County's Law and Justice Council, fulfilling a requirement in state law ([RCW 72.09.300](#)) and creating an ongoing oversight and coordination function for the group. The Task Force includes a broad range of participants, such as representatives from organizations involved in the criminal legal system and law enforcement, policy makers, service providers, members of the public, and consumers of services.

In its early history, the Task Force's contributions included an assessment of existing criminal legal system and support services and recommendations for reform. In recent years, the Whatcom County Council initiated a [Public Health, Safety and Justice Initiative](#) (aka the Justice Project) and asked for significant time and input from the Task Force, subject matter experts, and community members to produce a community-based [Justice Project Needs Assessment](#). The Needs Assessment took a comprehensive look at needs and gaps across the criminal legal and supportive service systems. This was immediately followed by development of a [Justice Project Implementation Plan](#) that identified 15 projects to advance five central strategies:

- Ensuring oversight, accountability, and transparency
- Increasing access to behavioral health services
- Building the array of facilities needed to promote public health, safety, and justice
- Expanding the capacity of programs to reduce incarceration/re-incarceration
- Making system changes with local, regional, state, and federal partners

In July 2023, County Council formally adopted the Implementation Plan and approved submission of a ballot proposition to authorize a sales and use tax ([Ordinance 2023-039](#)), which voters approved in November 2023. The Ordinance included delegation of new responsibilities for the Task Force to:

- Monitor progress on the 15 projects of the Implementation Plan.
- Coordinate with the Executive's Office, the Finance and Facility Advisory Board, and others to maximize resources, build capacity, and align plans to accomplish projects.
- Consult with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities, service providers, and people with lived experience about progress on Implementation Plan projects and future planning efforts.

The past year has been one of reflection, planning, and restructuring for the Task Force. The Co-chairs led a process to re-affirm the IPRTF's historical role (providing research, analysis, and recommendations grounded in best practice) and integrate its additional responsibilities (facilitating community engagement and fostering accountability and transparency). The Task Force also developed an Action Plan, and conducted a training for its members for how to more effectively develop policy recommendations for consideration by the Whatcom County Council.

About This Report

This report illustrates how the roles and responsibilities of the Task Force have evolved and what has been accomplished during the reporting period. The report has two sections:

- I. The first section contains the annual report of the Task Force, reviewing IPRTF activities and accomplishments for the period of July 2024 through June 2025. It builds on the contents of the Task Force's [2024 Year-End Report](#).
- II. The second section, which is new this year, is a report on progress toward the goals of the Justice Project Implementation Plan. The ordinance that governs the work of the Justice Project requires the Task Force to submit an Implementation Plan progress report annually. This report covers the period from November 2023, when the sales tax funding Justice Project activities was passed, through June 2025. All future reports will cover a one-year period between July and June.

The first section discusses the major topics before the Task Force and its committees over the past year. These are:

- Task Force organizational development.
- Implementation Plan priorities.
- Communications and transparency.
- Legislative priorities.

Significant accomplishments in the past twelve months, include:

- Revisiting the roles and structure of the Task Force and its committees to meet current oversight and advisory needs related to the Justice Project.
- Identifying 10 goals which are aligned with the Justice Project Implementation Plan. From these 10 goals, three were prioritized for 2025.
- Developing a [2025 IPRTF Action Plan](#) focused on priority goals and strategies to achieve meaningful community impact.
- Launching the Justice Project Oversight and Planning (JPOP) Committee, which has a diverse membership of stakeholders including BIPOC communities, service providers, and people with lived experience in the criminal legal system.
- Supporting development of a Justice Project Performance Measurement Plan.
- Ensuring transparency and accountability by monitoring progress on all 15 Implementation Plan projects, and utilizing the [Justice Project website](#) and IPRTF social media to regularly share progress with the public.

IPRTF 2025 GOALS	
1	Best practices for jail and Behavioral Care Center
2	Data dashboard for key metrics and data-sharing
3	Diversion programs
4	Reentry services
5	Court reforms
6	Communication and coordination between systems
7	Best practices for all IPRTF domains
8	Identify additional facility needs
9	Supportive housing
10	Updated Sequential Intercept Model

The Task Force and its committees are now engaged in researching and analyzing best practices, developing recommendations and strategies for implementation, and assessing risks to future progress (see [2025 IPRTF Action Plan](#)).

The second section of the report highlights progress across all 15 Implementation Plan projects. **Some of the significant accomplishments** since November 2023 are:

- Hiring a Special Projects Manager, and selection of an Owner's Representative (STV) to oversee the Jail and Behavioral Care Center design process and facilitate stakeholder engagement. Currently, the County and STV are in the process of hiring a design-build contractor.
- Increasing communication and coordination between organizations has streamlined access to services for people in crisis or transitioning from incarceration.
- Expansion of diversion programs, which has increased capacity to divert people to needed behavioral health services rather than incarceration.
- Additional jail re-entry staff to provide more individuals with the support needed for successful reintegration into the community, and reduced recidivism.
- Changes to court systems that have reduced barriers, enhanced accessibility, promoted restoration, and reduced recidivism.
- Completion of a Performance Measurement Plan with identified outcomes and measures to track progress toward Implementation Plan goals.

The report also notes emerging obstacles to continued progress. Considerable uncertainty related to federal, state, and local funding levels and other state and federal actions may impact future progress on Justice Project implementation priorities. The County, Task Force, Finance and Facility Advisory Board, and community partners will continue to monitor these developments and strategize about how to minimize potential risks.

The progress made to transform Whatcom County's criminal legal system over the past decade is a testament to the commitment and collaboration of Whatcom County leadership, Task Force members, Justice Project partners, and the staff of local governments across Whatcom County. The continued dedication and passion of service providers, advocates, and a host of community stakeholders has been essential to forward motion. Though much work remains, the progress made is significant and deserving of recognition.

2025 Annual Report and Justice Project Implementation Plan Progress Report

Background

The Whatcom County Council created the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (hereafter referred to as the IPRTF or Task Force) in 2015 to continually review Whatcom County's criminal justice and behavioral health programs and make specific recommendations to the County Council and Executive that will safely and effectively reduce incarceration of individuals struggling with mental illness and substance use disorder and minimize jail use by pretrial defendants who can safely be released. In 2019, the Task Force's role was broadened to also serve as the County's Law and Justice Council, fulfilling a requirement in state law ([RCW 72.09.300](#)) and creating an ongoing oversight and coordination function for the group.

[Ordinance 2015-025](#) structured the work of the Task Force into three phases and several objectives. The Task Force delivered [Phase I](#) and [Phase II Reports](#) in 2016, which included recommendations for a new crisis triage facility; a description of current justice system and behavioral health programs; recommendations for reducing barriers for electronic home monitoring; a map of existing behavioral health programs; and a discussion of how to develop effective programs.

The Task Force received consultation services in 2017 from the Vera Institute of Justice to provide technical analysis of Whatcom County's criminal legal system and to identify and recommend best practices for achieving the Task Force's goals. Vera produced [The Vera Report](#), a systematic report of their findings and recommendations for reducing incarceration.

The [Initial Phase III](#) and [Final Phase III Reports](#) were delivered in July 2017. The reports highlighted the ongoing work of the Task Force to develop crisis triage facility specifications and a preferred location, and investigations on expanding alternatives to incarceration. They also explored the recommendations of the Vera Institute of Justice and efforts to develop alternatives to incarceration. (For a complete listing of Task Force reports, see the Task Force's [Reports website](#).)

These initial efforts led to the development of additional community-based interventions and services, improved system coordination, and an ongoing examination of system functioning, equity, and outcomes. The Task Force was a driving force behind key accomplishments, including creation of the Ground Level Response and Coordinated Engagement (GRACE) and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) programs, and the construction of the crisis triage facility called the Anne Deacon Center for Hope, which was completed in 2021.

In 2022, Whatcom County Council initiated a community-based [Justice Project Needs Assessment](#), and asked for significant time and input from the Task Force, subject matter experts, and community members. The Needs Assessment took a comprehensive look at needs and gaps across the criminal legal and supportive service systems. This was immediately followed by development of a [Justice Project Implementation Plan](#) that identified 15 projects to advance five central strategies:

- Ensuring oversight, accountability, and transparency
- Increasing access to behavioral health services
- Building the array of facilities needed to promote public health, safety, and justice
- Expanding the capacity of programs to reduce incarceration/re-incarceration
- Making system changes with local, regional, state, and federal partners

In July 2023, County Council formally adopted the Implementation Plan and approved submission of a ballot proposition to authorize a sales and use tax ([Ordinance 2023-039](#)), which voters approved in November 2023. New responsibilities were delegated to the Task Force in that Ordinance, including:

- Monitoring progress on the 15 projects of the Implementation Plan.
- Coordinating with the Executive's Office, the Finance and Facility Advisory Board, and others to maximize resources, build capacity, and align plans to accomplish projects.
- Consulting with Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities, service providers, and people with lived experience about progress on Implementation Plan projects and future planning efforts.

In the Fall of 2024, the Task Force leadership and consultants worked with the Executive's Office to clarify the **Roles of Entities Monitoring the Justice Project** in order to ensure that parties had the same interpretation of the Ordinance (see Appendix A). The IPRTF's roles include identifying needs, supporting research and promotion of best practices, facilitating community engagement, fostering accountability and transparency, and producing policy recommendations for consideration by the Whatcom County Council. To fulfill these roles, the Task Force has been working to increase the capacity and effectiveness of members and the committees to vet and analyze policies, develop motions for Task Force consideration, and deliver policy recommendations.

The evolving responsibilities of the Task Force have required a re-examination of Task Force functions during the reporting period, leading to the formation of a new committee and new workgroups, changes in how the committees focus their work, and the development of a [2025 IPRTF Action Plan](#). In addition to these organizationally-focused changes to the Task Force, the need to improve communication and transparency and to position the Justice Project to adapt to considerable uncertainty due to state and federal action have been topics of discussion during the reporting period.

Report Overview

The Task Force provides two updates per year to the County Council and Executive. The annual written report is presented no later than June 30th of each year. This report contains summaries of a broad range of activities and outcomes resulting from the work of the Task Force and its stakeholder members. A year-end summary and plan for the upcoming year is also submitted in December.

This 2025 Annual Report has a new structure because it also addresses the requirement of the ordinance that governs the work of the Justice Project which calls for the Task Force to submit an Implementation Plan progress report annually. Therefore, this report has two sections:

- I. The first section contains the annual report of the Task Force. The Task Force is required to update the Executive and Council on its activities twice a year. This report reviews activities and accomplishments of the Task Force for the period of July 2024 through June 2025. It builds on the contents of the Task Force's [2024 Year-End Report](#).
- II. The second section is a report on progress toward the goals of the Justice Project Implementation Plan. This report covers the period from November 2023, when the sales tax funding Justice Project activities was passed, through June 2025. All future reports will cover a one-year period between July and June.

This annual reporting period presents an opportunity to recognize significant progress in positioning the Task Force and Justice Project for accomplishment over the coming year while recognizing the challenges ahead.

I. 2025 IPRTF Annual Report

Topics Before the Task Force

In 2024-2025, the major topics and items before the Task Force and its committees included:

- Task Force organizational development.
- Implementation Plan priorities.
- Communications and transparency.
- Legislative priorities.

TASK FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

With the launch of the Justice Project Implementation Plan, the work of the Task Force has evolved to focus on facilitation of Justice Project Implementation Plan priorities and associated system improvements needed to meet Justice Project and IPRTF goals. In August 2024, the Task Force Co-chairs conducted a study examining and reflecting upon the responsibilities, functioning, and structure of the IPRTF. A report prepared by the Co-chairs identified six priorities for the Task Force. The report included findings and related recommendations for improving communications; the structure, practices, and planning work of the Task Force; and expansion and engagement of the IPRTF and committees' membership. The report has provided a structure to guide Task Force work, organizational effectiveness improvements, and committee functions.

SIX PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY IPRTF CO-CHAIRS	
1	Launching the Justice Project Oversight and Planning (JPOP) Committee, ensuring that activities of the JPOP are aligned and integrated with the Task Force as a whole.
2	Communicating with partners, stakeholders, and community members about progress and impact.
3	Measuring progress and ensuring accountability through the continuous improvement of data systems across and within systems.
4	Revisiting the charge, design, and work plan of the Task Force and its committees to meet current oversight and advisory needs, to re-engage members, and to achieve meaningful community impact.
5	Facilitating progress on the Justice Project Implementation Plan.
6	Reinforcing a culture of productive engagement and impact across Task Force members and County partners.

Revitalization of Task Force Committees

The past year has been a period of reorganization, realignment, and recommitment to the roles and responsibilities of the Task Force. Changing membership and a refocusing of roles and responsibilities prompted a revitalization process within the Behavioral Health and INDEX Committees. Retirements and changing work responsibilities impacted the membership of the Behavioral Health Committee in particular. As a result, the Behavioral Health Committee has recruited and oriented several new members, and as of this report, now includes 28 members.

The Behavioral Health Committee and INDEX Committee have both re-examined their respective advisory roles. The Behavioral Health Committee is focusing its attention on developing best practice recommendations for reentry and diversion services while also exploring options for the development of a behavioral health campus on Division Street in Bellingham, site of the Anne Deacon Center for Hope. The INDEX Committee revised its mission statement, with revisions incorporated into the Task Force's establishing ordinance. The work of the INDEX Committee going forward will be to make recommendations for data collection and analysis and performance management, working collaboratively with the JPOP Committee and various County departments.

Justice Project Oversight and Planning Committee Formation – The JPOP Committee convened in October 2024 with the purpose of monitoring progress toward Justice Project Implementation Plan goals, participating in the evaluation of progress, ensuring robust public engagement and communications, contributing to the Task Force's annual report to the County Council, and recommending periodic updates to the Implementation Plan. The JPOP Committee provides a forum for people with lived experience and frontline workers to engage with and support Justice Project implementation.

The work of the JPOP Committee is highlighted in the Justice Project Implementation Plan Priorities section below and in “Section II. Justice Project Implementation Plan Progress Report.”

Task Force Committees

The Task Force has five committees to work on specific criminal legal system or behavioral health issues:

- The **Legal and Justice Systems Committee** examines reforms in law enforcement and judicial practices to safely divert more people from jail or reduce time in incarceration when possible. This committee also supports and participates in a related Pretrial Processes Work Group advising Superior Court judicial officers and its administration.
- The **Behavioral Health Committee** identifies ways to improve delivery of mental health and substance use disorder treatments to help people avoid entanglement with or transition out of the criminal legal system.
 - Quarterly joint meetings of the Legal and Justice Systems and Behavioral Health Committees allow collaboration on projects that impact both groups. Reentry, diversion, and behavioral health crisis response are examples of services that impact both the criminal legal and behavioral health systems in the community.
- The **Information Needs and Data Exchange (INDEX) Committee** works to improve data availability, provide jurisdictions with data to improve operations, and make information on incarceration trends available to the public and policy makers.
- The **Justice Project Oversight and Planning (JPOP) Committee** monitors progress toward Justice Project Implementation Plan goals, ensures robust public engagement and communications, and recommends periodic updates to the Implementation Plan.
- The **Crisis Stabilization Facility Committee**, which was officially sunsetted in May 2025, supported creation of the Anne Deacon Center for Hope for the initial treatment of individuals experiencing acute behavioral health issues and to provide an alternative to jail and the hospital emergency department.

Workgroup Formation and Sunsetting – The Competency Restoration Workgroup formed independently of the Task Force with the purpose of finding solutions to extreme delays by the State’s competency evaluation and restoration services. This workgroup completed its work during the reporting period.

With the completion and opening of the Anne Deacon Center for Hope in 2021, the main goal of the Crisis Stabilization Committee was achieved. The Committee continued to work to improve operational processes and increase utilization of the Anne Deacon Center until the latter half of 2024 when the Task Force approved a recommendation from the Steering Committee to suspend the Crisis Stabilization Committee until May 2025. At the May Task Force meeting, the members voted to sunset this Committee with the understanding that quarterly reports from Pioneer Human Services, Compass Health, and Whatcom County Health and Community Services will be encouraged to ensure operational and utilization improvements at the Anne Deacon Center continue to be addressed.

In March 2025, the Task Force approved the formation of a new Behavioral Care Center (BCC) Workgroup to advance planning and implementation of a Behavioral Care Center, inspired by a model in Nashville, Tennessee. The BCC Workgroup will explore options for the design and operation of a facility intended to provide a voluntary alternative to incarceration for individuals with low-level felonies, misdemeanors, or gross misdemeanors who are experiencing mental health crises and/or substance use issues. The workgroup will explore best practices, ensure compliance with state laws, engage local stakeholders, and identify how the BCC can be effectively integrated into the continuum of care for individuals with behavioral health needs. The workgroup will examine how existing models can be tailored for use in

Whatcom County to provide an effective diversion from jail while delivering high-quality care for individuals in crisis.

<u>Task Force Workgroups & Their Members</u>	
Workgroup under the IPRTF:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behavioral Care Center (BCC) Workgroup: Peter Frazier, Workgroup Convener Caleb Erickson Starck Follis Erik Sigmar 	
	Hannah Fisk Eric Richey Maia Vanyo
Workgroup under the Legal & Justice Systems Committee	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pretrial Processes Workgroup: Judge Evan Jones, Chair Caryl Dunavan Adam Fryer Dave Graham Kelsey MacDonald Maia Vanyo 	
	Alan Epps Stephen Gockley Stephanie Kraft Tommy McAuliffe Jake Wiebusch
Workgroups under the Behavioral Health and Legal & Justice Systems Committees:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reentry/Diversion: Brian Estes, Workgroup Convener Hannah Fisk Mike Hilley Chao-ying Wu 	
	Alexis Hahs Maia Vanyo
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data: Dean Wight, Workgroup Convener Amy Hockenberry Wendy Jones 	
	Cedric Johnson Berdi Safford
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Division St. Behavioral Health Campus: Dan Hammill, Workgroup Convener Danny Carroll Hanna Fisk Steven Traff 	
	Arlene Feld Tory Sandoz

The Behavioral Health and Legal and Justice Systems Committees have formed three informal workgroups to focus on their shared priorities. One is a Reentry/Diversion Workgroup which builds on the Legal and Justice Systems Committee's exploration of diversion options with the Pretrial Processes Workgroup, and the Behavioral Health Committee's focus on strong reentry support services. A new Data Workgroup is working in coordination with the INDEX Committee to develop plans for improved data collection and analysis systems. The third new Workgroup is exploring options for expanding use of the Division Street Behavioral Health Campus, which is currently the site of the Anne Deacon Center for Hope and didg'wálic Wellness Center. Discussions include building a 23-hour Crisis Relief Center on this campus (Implementation Plan Project 7), repurposing of the current Work Center, and the launch of additional services.

As transitions occur with the sunsetting of some workgroups and the formation of others, the Task Force is examining ways to formalize this process in order to inform community members and stakeholders about key accomplishments and the conclusion of each group's work.

Task Force Action Plan

Based on a review of the Co-chairs' report findings and a review of roles and responsibilities identified in the Justice Program Implementation Plan, the Task Force identified and prioritized ten goals to guide its work in the coming months. By order of priority, these goals are:

IPRTF 2025 GOALS	
1.	Adapting best practices for designing and operating the new jail and Behavioral Care Center to meet Whatcom County's specific needs, ensuring effective service delivery.
2.	Creating a data dashboard to track key metrics and support data-sharing between criminal justice and behavioral health organizations, and the public, promoting transparency and informed decision-making.
3.	Strengthening and evaluating diversion programs for justice-involved individuals with behavioral health and substance use disorders, focusing on improving outcomes, reducing recidivism, and providing alternatives to incarceration.

4.	Enhancing reentry services such as case management, peer support, housing, and healthcare to reduce recidivism and support successful community reintegration.
5.	Researching options and advocating for court reforms to reduce incarceration rates, decrease pretrial detention, increase case resolution efficiency, and expand alternatives to bail for more equitable outcomes.
6.	Developing systems to improve communication and coordination between behavioral health providers working with justice-involved clients, ensuring seamless care and integrated service delivery.
7.	Researching and recommending best practices across IPRTF domains to improve effectiveness and drive system-wide improvements.
8.	Identifying additional facility needs to support individuals with behavioral health and substance use disorders at risk of incarceration, ensuring resources are aligned with community needs.
9.	Expanding supportive housing for individuals with behavioral health issues and a history of incarceration, providing stable housing to reduce recidivism and support recovery.
10.	Periodically updating and applying the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM), prioritizing key gaps identified by subject matter experts to reduce the jail population of individuals with mental health and substance use disorders.

While the Task Force will work to advance all ten goals, the first three goals (discussed below) will be prioritized for short-term action. Through the planning process, each IPRTF committee was asked to identify ways that the committee can contribute to the priorities, as appropriate to their own charters and the roles and responsibilities of the IPRTF. The [2025 IPRTF Action Plan](#) lays out focus topics and related action items for each of the committees, and a process that integrates the reporting cycle and planning for the future.

TASK FORCE ACTION PLAN ALIGNMENT WITH JUSTICE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN PRIORITIES

With the launch of the Justice Project Implementation Plan, the Task Force and its committees have oriented their activities to align with the 15 Justice Project Implementation Plan projects. As described above, the Task Force identified ten goals to guide its work. The goals reflect the new responsibilities of the Task Force as a key partner in implementation of Justice Plan projects and reinforce the Task Force's position as the County's Law and Justice Council. Through a prioritization process, Task Force members voted to prioritize the following three of the ten goals in 2025:

1. Adapt best practices for designing and operating the new jail BCC to meet Whatcom County's specific needs, ensuring effective service delivery.
2. Create a data dashboard to track key metrics and support data-sharing between criminal justice and behavioral health organizations and the public, promoting transparency and informed decision making.
3. Strengthen and evaluate diversion programs for justice-involved individuals with behavioral health and substance use disorders, focusing on improving outcomes, reducing recidivism, and providing alternatives to incarceration.

Progress towards each goal over the reporting period is detailed below.

Goal 1: Adapt best practices for designing and operating the new jail and Behavioral Care Center (BCC)

At the request of the Chief of Corrections, Crossroads Consulting is conducting focus groups and a survey with incarcerated individuals to inform jail planning efforts. The JPOP Committee is providing input on the

focus group and survey questions and will also provide its perspectives on public engagement opportunities as jail planning and design ramps up.

As described above, the Task Force also formed a new Behavioral Care Center Workgroup, which will be responsible for making recommendations related to the design, operations, and service model of a new BCC. The Legal and Justice Systems Committee is working to better understand how the relaxation of booking restrictions that is now underway will affect jail capacity planning, as well as court processes.

Many of the financial assumptions that informed initial jail planning and diversion efforts have now changed. In the most recent legislative session, the Washington State Legislature confronted a significant budget deficit. The state budget includes some cuts to available funding and services, which could affect plans for the jail and/or BCC. Sales tax revenue is declining due to reduced cross-border traffic. The Task Force is examining various funding scenarios and assumptions in order to keep Justice Project implementation on track and achieve desired outcomes.

Goal 2: Create a data dashboard to track key metrics and support data-sharing

All of the committees of the Task Force have played a role in establishing data priorities for Justice Project evaluation, performance management, and transparency. The County hired a consultant group, VillageReach, to develop a Performance Measurement Plan for Justice Project implementation. The JPOP Committee has worked with VillageReach to help define high-level outcomes, and the INDEX Committee has helped to define measures and identify existing data sources. The Behavioral Health and Legal and Justice Systems Committees have formed an informal joint data workgroup and will work with the INDEX Committee to develop plans for improved data collection and analysis systems. This will include developing accurate and consistent data definitions, assessing available baseline data, ensuring quality data entry, and considering racial and other disparities. During the current reporting period, Task Force committees have been engaged in:

- Development of consistent data definitions (e.g., metrics for recidivism and success of diversion programs).
- Outreach to County departmental staff to explore available data sources and data sharing arrangements.
- Considering what criminal legal system measures beyond those associated with the Justice Project may be of interest to develop and track over time.

Data that are identified and collected will serve two purposes. Data will be publicly available on a data dashboard and they will also be used to inform process and program improvements.

Goal 3: Strengthen and evaluate diversion programs for justice-involved individuals

The Behavioral Health and Legal and Justice Systems Committees have both prioritized the expansion of diversion services in their action plans. Both committees are actively involved in planning for the BCC and 23-hour Crisis Relief Center facilities, which will serve as key diversion facilities. The scope of diversion services being considered includes reentry services for people leaving incarceration, which, when administered effectively, serve the purposes of diversion by reducing recidivism rates. Reentry services span behavioral health support, substance use treatment, case management, and peer support.

The Legal and Justice Systems Committee and the Pretrial Processes Workgroup are focusing on strengthening and evaluating diversion programs and improving coordination among systems working with justice-involved individuals. Committee and Workgroup members are also engaged in discussions about data definitions and data collection to assess the effectiveness of pretrial services and other diversion efforts underway.

The Behavioral Health Committee has been particularly focused on gathering information about model reentry programs around the country. In addition to researching various reentry programs (e.g., Homeboy Industries and One Parish, One Prisoner), the Behavioral Health Committee is exploring prospective partnerships with Bellingham Technical College and Whatcom Community College to support reentry

(e.g., job training). The Health Care Authority Reentry Demonstration Initiative Program, administered in Whatcom County by the Sheriff's Office and Whatcom County Juvenile Court, is another component of the Task Force's reentry focus (see Section 3, Justice Project Implementation Plan Progress Report for more information).

The Behavioral Health Committee is also exploring options for expanding use of the Division Street Behavioral Health Campus, site of the Anne Deacon Center for Hope, to not only include a 23-hour Crisis Relief Center, but also a repurposing of the current Work Center and the launch of additional services. A Work Center Behavioral Health Pilot program was initiated in October, focused on reentry and involving regular counseling and peer group work. A first cohort completed the 6-week pilot program in 2024, and the next cohort will begin the program in 2025.

In February 2025, a partnership consisting of the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, and Swinomish Tribe began providing medication-assisted therapies for people with substance use disorders. The Swinomish didg^wálič Wellness Center has an office at the Division Street campus, with the capacity to serve up to 400 patients daily. The development of additional sites for mobile medical units is expected. The didg^wálič Wellness Center also has a state-of-the-art outpatient clinic in Anacortes that serves individuals with substance use disorders in Whatcom, Island, Skagit, and Snohomish counties. Efforts are underway to increase community awareness and utilization of these resources.

As described below, Whatcom County sought funding from the Legislature and continues to seek funding to support the Crisis Relief Center, but engagement of other funding partners (e.g., PeaceHealth) may also be possible.

COMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPARENCY

To increase transparency and engage community stakeholders, the Task Force engaged Pyramid Communications in 2022 to develop a communications infrastructure to share progress related to the work of the Task Force. The Task Force continues to rely upon the infrastructure developed, including the Justice Project webpage and use of social media, to make information about the work of the Task Force accessible to community stakeholders. The Task Force is also considering community engagement strategies such as providing profiles of Task Force and committee members, highlights of Task Force meetings and key accomplishments shared on social media, and the creation of educational clips about the work of the Task Force and County government.

The JPOP Committee has also been engaged in strategies to improve public communication about Justice Project implementation. These strategies include the development of graphic summaries highlighting key accomplishments from the Justice Project Quarterly Progress Reports provided by the Whatcom County Executive's Office and enhanced communication with community members via press releases and regular postings to the updated [Justice Project website](#) and to social media.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The Task Force and its committees identified and discussed several legislative priorities for the 2025 legislative session. Discussions of priorities identified in the County's legislative agenda included:

- A capital budget request to fund construction of the BCC.
- Support for housing policy modernization for individuals with severe mental health conditions.
- A request for a regulatory framework and operating funds for Crisis Relief Centers, such as that envisioned for Whatcom County.

Unfortunately, the Legislature failed to act upon these priorities in the last session. These will continue to be needs going forward. Additional legislative priorities identified and discussed by the Task Force are described below.

Behavioral Health System

Statewide legislative solutions are needed to strengthen and expand the behavioral health workforce, including increased compensation and Medicaid reimbursement. Higher Medicaid reimbursement rates are needed to ensure that community providers have the resources necessary to provide quality care and to recruit, train, and retain qualified staff. For years, reimbursement rates have failed to keep up with the cost of care. Washington's federal Medicaid reimbursement rates reportedly rank among the [lowest in the country](#), and [rates have not increased](#) in over a decade. Local behavioral health care providers and providers across the state continue to call for legislative solutions to resolve these challenges related to access to behavioral health care services.

In addition to issues related to Medicaid, Involuntary Treatment Act (ITA) reforms are needed, and 911 and 988 system coordination needs to be improved. The expansion of treatment criteria, streamlining of court processes, and enhanced service coordination are among the reforms needed to increase the effectiveness of the ITA. This includes broadening of the criteria that determine application of the ITA to mental health crises that have not yet reached imminent danger. In addition, the 911 and 988 systems could be better coordinated to ensure that the most appropriate care is provided to individuals in crisis. Although a bill relating to appointed counsel for individuals detained under the Involuntary Treatment Act passed during the most recent legislative session, other reforms have yet to be addressed.

The Task Force also discussed capital and operational funding needs for the BCC and 23-hour Crisis Relief Center, as well as the need for jail-based substance use disorder treatment and domestic violence offender treatment investments. While capital funding for construction has largely been secured, the reimbursement model is not adequate to sustain operations. A solution to the operating funding is needed prior to initiating construction.

Housing Supply and Affordability

Across the state, a regulatory framework, as well as capital and operational funding, are needed to increase available housing options. This would include housing availability for individuals with severe behavioral health conditions. Funding available as a result of the *Trueblood* case could provide a source of funding to improve housing options for those with mental health needs (see Project 12 in the Implementation Plan Progress Report below for additional discussion). In addition, gaps in the housing continuum exist for people with certain behavioral health conditions (e.g., fentanyl addiction). Strategies and funding are needed to fill these gaps as well.

Although the most recent state capital budget makes an investment of nearly \$761 million in affordable housing statewide, a Whatcom County-backed proposal to enable counties or cities to impose a real estate excise tax for the purpose of developing affordable housing, along with several other proposals to increase housing capacity and/or affordability, failed to move forward this session. The passage of House Bill 1110 in the 2023-2024 legislative session, however, fosters greater flexibility in addressing housing needs through zoning reform by mandating that cities allow the development of "missing middle" housing in residential areas where single-family detached homes have previously been the predominant housing type.

Court Processes

The Washington State Supreme Court continues to consider changes to workload standards affecting Public Defender's Offices across the state. Depending upon the Court's eventual ruling, significant staffing and funding increases would be required across the state, including in Whatcom County, to meet the new workload standards. The proposed change in workload standards would place an unsustainable financial burden on Whatcom County jurisdictions. Courts will also need additional funding to respond to past and new legislative mandates requiring increased public access to courts for filing civil protection orders, which include domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, harassment, and abuse of vulnerable adults.

The Task Force is tracking developments at the state and federal levels related to potential Medicaid cuts, state funding cuts, the effects of federal staffing and funding cuts or freezes, and other federal actions affecting state and local revenue. State and federal actions could pose challenges to Justice Project implementation priorities. The Task Force will continue to monitor developments, assess impacts, and work to identify alternative pathways to achieving Justice Project implementation goals.

II. Justice Project Implementation Plan Progress Report

Overview

This section covers progress made on the Justice Project Implementation Plan projects and fulfills obligations stated in [Ordinance 2023-039](#). This is the first such report since approval of the Implementation Plan in July 2023, and the passage of Proposition 2023-04 in November 2023, authorizing a sales and use tax for costs associated with a new county jail, behavioral health services, and other facilities and services to prevent and reduce incarceration. The timeframe for this report is November 2023 – June 2025. Future annual reports will cover one year, from July – June.

The content is based on quarterly progress reports that are prepared by the County Executive’s Office and presented to the IPRTF. This content is summarized below and elaborated with additional information. It covers:

Links to the full Quarterly Progress Reports:

- [June 2024](#)
- [October 2024](#)
- [January 2025](#)
- [April 2025](#)

Summaries of the quarterly reports are posted to the [Justice Project website](#).

- Steps taken and progress made toward the goals of the Implementation Plan. This section makes up the majority of the report and is structured to align with the Implementation Plan. It describes progress made on each of the 15 Implementation Plan projects which are grouped under five central strategies.
- Resources needed to further meet goals. Because the work is at an early stage, some anticipated resource needs have been identified but not detailed. A process is under development for identifying gaps in resources, vetting proposed expenditures, determining cost estimates, researching funding sources, and coordinating resource requests.
- Looking ahead. This section gives a brief summary of the IPRTF’s focus for the coming year.

Steps Taken and Progress Made Toward the Goals of the Implementation Plan

The Justice Project Implementation Plan includes 15 projects grouped under five strategies designed to make changes in systems, services, and facilities. The following section describes steps taken and progress made on each of the 15 projects.

Five Strategies	• 15 Projects
I. Ensure Oversight, Accountability, & Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •1. Establish a Justice Project Oversight & Planning (JPOP) Committee. •2. Establish a Justice Project Finance Advisory Board. •3. Collect data to measure progress toward desired outcomes & develop a data dashboard.
II. Increase Access to Behavioral Health Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •4. Address workforce shortages in behavioral health services. •5. Build systems to facilitate communication and coordination between organizations. •6. Increase the capacity of effective existing programs to divert people from incarceration.
III. Build Facilities Needed to Promote Public Health, Safety, & Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •7. Build a 23-hour Crisis Relief Center. •8. Build a new jail and behavioral health treatment center. •9. Identify what additional facilities are needed to support people with behavioral health and substance use issues at risk of incarceration.
IV. Expand the Capacity of Programs to Reduce Incarceration/Re-incarceration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •10. Ensure people leaving detention & Treatment facilities have transportation to a safe destination. •11. Bolster re-entry support services. •12. Maintain & expand supporting housing programs.
V. Make Systems Changes with Local, Regional, State, & Federal Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •13. Continue to make changes in court systems. •14 Expedite access to competency restoration services. •15. Advocate for a state waiver to allow use of Medicaid funds.

STRATEGY I: ENSURE OVERSIGHT, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND TRANSPARENCY

Project 1: Establish a Justice Project Oversight and Planning (JPOP) Committee

- Committee members were recruited to fill the 20 specified seats for the JPOP Committee.
 - The representatives from Lummi Nation, Nooksack Indian Tribe, and persons with lived experience have had less consistent participation due to competing priorities.
 - The Implementation Plan called for stipends for individuals who are not paid by their organizations for their time to serve on the committee, but the County has not made stipends available. There are several JPOP Committee members who would benefit from a stipend, as noted above, and it would likely help to increase their participation in meetings and enhance recruitment efforts if a stipend were offered.
- The JPOP Committee met for the first time on October 17, 2024 and continues to meet once a month for two hours. Meeting attendance generally has been robust. In addition to JPOP Committee members, participants have included many non-members from different IPRTF committees, Whatcom County Health and Community Services (WCHCS), and other interested individuals.

- The first few meetings involved formalizing the committee’s processes which included:
 - Adoption of a JPOP Committee [Charter](#) and [Rules of Procedure](#).
 - Developing a 2025 Action Plan to guide the committee’s work.
 - Electing committee Co-chairs and a Protégé (a committee member who wants to learn what is involved in carrying out the Chair role by observing and participating in all activities with the Co-chairs).
- The JPOP Committee is charged with:
 - Serving as a forum for people with lived experience and frontline workers to be engaged and give feedback on key questions as the Justice Project Implementation Plan is implemented.
 - Participating in the development of an evaluation plan to measure progress and results.
 - Monitoring data to track progress on the Implementation Plan projects.
 - Preparing an annual report.
 - Providing recommendations for Plan updates.
 - Ensuring public engagement and communications are robust to facilitate accountability in the Plan’s implementation.
- In carrying out these roles, the JPOP Committee has focused on the following activities:
 - Assisting with development of a Performance Measurement Plan to track progress on Implementation Plan projects. This work has included:
 - Results-Based Accountability training provided by WCHCS staff in Nov. 2024.
 - Working with the consultant, VillageReach, who contracted with the County to develop the Performance Measurement Plan. VillageReach presented and gathered input regarding outcomes and measures from the JPOP Committee at the February, March, and April meetings.
 - Planning for stakeholder engagement in the jail and Behavioral Care Center (BCC) design.
 - Whatcom County’s Corrections Chief presented to the JPOP Committee in January 2025, sharing background information and a vision for the new jail and BCC. A JPOP Co-chair also presented the results of the “Making Changes” pilot project that implemented some of the design concepts suggested for the jail.
 - In February, the County contracted with STV to serve as the Owner’s Representative to guide the jail/BCC design process. STV presented to the JPOP Committee in April 2025, sharing background about STV and the planning timeline.
 - The JPOP Committee provided feedback on questions for focus groups and a survey of jail inmates. Data collection will begin in May. When completed, the JPOP Committee will provide input on project reports.
 - Contributing feedback on public communications about the Justice Project.
 - The committee reviews summaries of quarterly progress reports from the Executive’s Office, noting key points to highlight for public communications via the Justice Project website and social media.
 - The committee reviews and comments on updates to the Justice Project website.
 - All JPOP Committee members are liaisons to the constituencies they represent and are asked to share resources and information about the Justice Project with their networks.

Project 2: Establish a Justice Project Finance and Facility Advisory Board (FFAB)

- The County Administration worked from December 2023 to May 2024 to negotiate a [Public Health, Safety and Justice Interlocal Agreement](#) between Whatcom County and all Whatcom County cities for management of the sales tax that will be used to build the new jail and BCC, and invest in incarceration prevention and reduction programs.

- Individuals have been recruited to fill the 13 specified seats on the FFAB. Currently, there are two vacant seats for the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe.
- The first FFAB meeting was held on September 26, 2024, and the FFAB continues to meet at least quarterly.
 - The first meetings involved adopting bylaws and a 2025 workplan.
 - The workplan is focused on policy and budget recommendations related to the construction of the new jail and BCC. The FFAB will be addressing the question of jail size, configuration, and operating model.
 - In February, PFM Financial Advisors provided refined cost projections and an updated financial model for funding the jail/BCC and other Implementation Plan projects for discussion with the FFAB.
 - The Owner's Representative, STV, met with the FFAB and discussed their tasks and timeline.
- The FFAB is required to produce their own report and a Spending Plan. The committee will wait until they have a full year of tax collection (end of June 2025) to submit a report later this summer.

Project 3: Collect data to measure progress toward desired outcomes and develop a data dashboard

- The County contracted with VillageReach to develop a Performance Measurement Plan for the Justice Project, including development of a communications plan for sharing outcomes with stakeholders and the public through data dashboards and other means.
 - VillageReach completed a review of relevant resources, *"Metrics and Evaluation Best Practices in the Criminal Justice Field,"* including [Justice Counts](#), [Measures for Justice](#), the [Sequential Intercept Model](#), and the [Stepping Up Initiative](#).
 - Draft definitions of success and measures for outcomes at project, program, system and community levels were developed by VillageReach with input from the JPOP and INDEX Committees, and individual stakeholders.
 - The Behavioral Health and Legal and Justice Committees formed a small, informal data workgroup to identify existing and needed data sources. The data workgroup met for the first time in April 2025. They are working with VillageReach to include this information in the Performance Measurement Plan.
 - A final Performance Measurement Plan will be completed by the end of June 2025.
- The County's Information Technology (IT) Division is actively recruiting to fill a number of vacant positions, including the Senior Applications Administrator position, to assist the Justice Project. The Applications Administrator will help extract the data needed to measure outcomes for the Implementation Plan projects. The current Senior Applications Administrator assigned to supporting the criminal justice system and other countywide systems continues to assist the Justice Project as time is available.
- IT is supporting advancements in criminal legal software systems, software integration, data automation, and reporting. This work will help providers to track individuals' progress through different court systems and their utilization of services across multiple providers.
- IT has completed the automation of WHAT-COMM 911 data to populate the WCHCS case management system used by the Response Systems Division.
- IT worked with the Sheriff's Office to re-engineer reporting systems for jail usage data which will contribute to performance measurement and jail capacity analysis.
- IT supported the Sheriff's Office to provide the Prosecutor's Office with current jail population data to analyze the efficacy of proposed Prosecutor diversion programs.
- Upgrades to case management systems have been implemented in the Public Defender and Prosecutor's Offices.
- A major upgrade to the Juvenile Court case management system is underway.

- The IPRTF and WCHCS convened a meeting of data partners to coordinate efforts on September 30, 2024. They created an asset inventory of Justice Project data resources.

STRATEGY II: INCREASE ACCESS TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Project 4: Address workforce shortages in behavioral health services

- Efforts to address workforce shortages in behavioral health services in Whatcom County agencies have focused primarily on building collaborations with local colleges and the university.
 - These schools, the County, and area provider organizations are working together to offer training opportunities for behavioral health providers to improve staff retention, strengthen recruitment pipelines, and ensure that schools' curricula align with the skills and knowledge required by local behavioral health agencies.
 - A comprehensive survey has been developed to identify key factors contributing to workforce shortages (challenges with recruitment, hiring, and retention) and prioritize actionable strategies that will effectively address these gaps. Four survey instruments will be used to collect responses from students, staff, supervisors, and Corrections staff.

Project 5: Build systems to facilitate communication and coordination between organizations

- WCHCS convenes nine multi-agency groups that meet regularly to increase coordination between agencies serving people involved in the criminal legal system. Participants include service providers, first responders, health providers, and local government partners. The groups are:
 - Opioid Response Multi-agency Coordination (MAC) group to increase coordination in tackling the fentanyl crisis in the community. MAC has several workgroups.
 - Bimonthly Response Systems Leadership and Policy Team.
 - Monthly Hospital and Community Provider Meeting.
 - Bimonthly Behavioral Health and Crisis Services Meeting.
 - Bimonthly Jail Reentry Service Coordination Meeting.
 - Monthly Jail Behavioral Health and Reentry Meeting.
 - Bimonthly Outreach Meeting.
 - No-Wrong Door Planning.
 - Monthly Crisis Stabilization Oversight Committee.
- These groups have seen progress toward increasing communication and coordination, including:
 - Better collaboration between law enforcement, medical services, and behavioral health providers.
 - Increased focus on offering alternatives to incarceration and increasing/streamlining access to treatment for people experiencing behavioral health crises.
 - More efficient identification of inmates' needs, which leads to better reentry planning.
 - Identification of gaps in services, and development of strategies to close these gaps.
 - Assurance that services are not duplicated and individuals are effectively supported.
 - No-wrong door planning to ensure people can be referred to community programs at any point of contact.
 - Groundwork for new facilities (e.g., 23-hour Crisis Relief Center) and the Behavioral Health Campus.

Project 6: Increase the capacity of effective existing programs to divert people from incarceration

- Increasing the capacity of effective existing diversion programs has meant adding staff positions. Additional staff added include:
 - 1 FTE for Mental Health Sentencing Alternative and Mental Health Court.
 - 1 FTE Overdose Prevention and Response position (this is a pilot project).
 - 1 FTE Substance Use Disorder Professional (SUDP) at the hospital (this is a pilot project).
 - 2 SUDP positions to help with judicially involved minors and adults.

- These increases in staff and strengthened connections between agencies have resulted in:
 - Conducting more mental health assessments for individuals facing criminal charges.
 - Streamlining the diversion process and providing timely and appropriate mental health care, leading to improved outcomes with the goal of reducing recidivism (Mental Health Court data supports a reduction in recidivism).
 - Increasing referrals and smoother transitions to treatment services, ensuring individuals are directed to appropriate substance use disorder services.
 - Producing evidence from pilot projects that embedding SUDPs in healthcare settings addresses the needs of individuals in crisis. For example, a pilot project with PeaceHealth is connecting those who have survived overdoses to recovery navigation support. Data analysis after the pilot phase will provide the basis for decisions about whether to recommend continuing these projects in 2026.
 - Funding for outreach and engagement services for youth and young adults involved in the juvenile court system. This grant-supported work is successfully engaging individuals who may not have previously had access to overdose prevention services or treatment options, helping to reduce the risk of opioid and substance use disorders and overdose-related incidents.
 - Increasing support for judicially involved minors and adults. The two new SUDPs conducted 214 substance use disorder assessments in 2024 and supported individuals to enter into inpatient treatment directly from jail when it was medically recommended.
- Unpredictable funding shifts are threatening the sustainability of successful diversion programs like LEAD and GRACE, which face potential budget cuts at the state and local levels.
- The Task Force's Behavioral Health Committee recently formed a small, informal workgroup focused on diversion and reentry efforts.

STRATEGY III: BUILD FACILITIES NEEDED TO PROMOTE PUBLIC HEALTH, SAFETY, AND JUSTICE

Project 7: Build a 23-hour Crisis Relief Center

- The County has secured \$14.2 million of the anticipated \$14.7 million needed to build a 23-hour Crisis Relief Center.
 - The planned facility includes 12,000 sq. ft. for the center and a 12,000 sq. ft. shell for future expansions, including co-located medical services.
- An architecture bid has been completed, and a Request for Proposals/Qualifications has been drafted for a provider to assist with planning.
- The County has conducted an operational viability assessment and interviews with statewide partners. From this information, staff have developed initial operational projections.
 - Unfortunately, it has come to light that there is a major systemic obstacle to funding these pilot facilities. There is no mechanism to reimburse operators for non-Medicaid patients, who make up approximately 50% of prospective clients.
 - The County's plan to contribute \$500,000 per year for center operations would not be nearly enough considering that an existing center that uses this model in King County recently saw an annual operating revenue gap of approximately \$10 million.
 - Whatcom and other counties that have planned to build 23-hour Crisis Relief Centers are advocating for a state fix for ten years of secure funding. No long-term fix emerged from the 2025 session that would address Whatcom County's concerns.
 - The project is in limbo while waiting to see what happens with projects in counties that are further along in their planning than Whatcom County. A decision on whether to proceed with this model or pivot to a different type of facility will be needed by early fall.
- The IPRTF Behavioral Health Committee created a small, informal workgroup focused on crisis services at the Division Street Behavioral Health Campus.

Project 8: Build a new jail and behavioral health treatment center

- As stated under Project 2 above, Whatcom County and all of the cities have approved a [Public Health, Safety and Justice Interlocal Agreement](#) to finance the new jail and BCC.
- The County hired an in-house construction project manager.
- An environmental assessment of the LaBounty property has been conducted and a wetlands mitigation plan has been developed.
- A delegation from Whatcom County visited model facilities in Columbus, OH and Nashville, TN. Seeing these facilities and learning about their operations was inspiring and helped to inform the vision for Whatcom County's facility. Contacts made on these site visits have continued to provide information and technical assistance.
 - The Public Defender's Office, Prosecutor's Office, and WCHCS are exploring opportunities for prosecutorial diversion at the BCC.
 - The IPRTF formed a BCC workgroup which will contribute to these discussions to help clarify and define how diversion programs will be utilized once the facility is operational.
- The County contracted with an Owner's Representative, STV, to support jail/BCC project planning.
 - STV worked with the County to successfully complete a Project Review Committee approval process.
 - STV and County Facilities are working with the Sheriff's Office on a jail capacity analysis which will directly inform the design process of the final facility.
 - Progress on predevelopment work is being made, including wetland mitigation planning and site preparation.
 - A Request for Qualifications was released for a design-build contractor for the jail/BCC. Applications were accepted through May 13. Three respondents will be selected to submit a full proposal.
- Pre-programming/design meetings with Sheriff's/Corrections staff have identified high-level operational priorities.
- A local team received training by the National Institute of Corrections on designing and transitioning to a new justice facility.
- New corrections standards for the Whatcom County Jail have been developed and approved to conform with current state laws (e.g., when to use force, booking procedures, etc.).
 - The Sheriff's Office is seeking accreditation of these standards. The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC) will soon assess the Sheriff's Office and Corrections going over all their policies and procedures. The standards will carry over to the new jail.

Project 9: Identify what additional facilities are needed to support people with behavioral health issues at risk of incarceration

- Regional meetings with counterparts from other counties and the North Sound Behavioral Health-Administrative Services Organization have identified the following needed facilities: a reentry center, secure detox, youth inpatient treatment facilities, youth crisis facilities, and treatment facilities for pregnant women. Discussion and exploration of state funding options continues with regional partners.
- The IPRTF has been encouraged to provide input regarding additional facilities the County and community partners should prioritize for funding requests and planning over the next several years.

STRATEGY IV: EXPAND THE CAPACITY OF PROGRAMS TO REDUCE INCARCERATION/RE-INCARCERATION

Project 10: Ensure people leaving detention and treatment facilities have transportation to a safe destination

- WCHCS added 1 FTE to increase transportation services for individuals at risk of incarceration/re-incarceration. This service is available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Project 11: Bolster reentry support services

- Increased staffing in the jail (2 FTE reentry support specialists and 1 FTE mental health professional) has resulted in:
 - Reentry support services provided to more people (e.g., case management, job training, housing assistance, and access to behavioral health services).
 - More individualized and intensive support.
 - Continuity of care for clients transitioning back into the community. Previous research has shown that a connection to, and the provision of, outpatient services can reduce recidivism and increase long-term integration.
- WCHCS, in partnership with the Sheriff's Office, has contracted for SUDP's to complete assessments in an expedited manner so individuals who are incarcerated can exit into treatment. This service provides assessments to over 200 individuals a year.
- Significant work has been devoted to sustaining these reentry support services and preserving their impact.
- All Hands Whatcom, a community collaboration to address the opioid crisis, hosted a well-attended [Reentry Simulation event](#) facilitated by two organizations from Kitsap County, Up from Slavery Initiative and Kitsap Strong. This event was designed to increase participants' understanding of the many challenges faced by individuals upon release from jail. Participants included prosecutors, defense attorneys, human service professionals, elected officials, community leaders, and many with lived experience in the criminal legal system.

Project 12: Maintain and expand supportive housing programs for people with behavioral health issues and a history of incarceration

- WCHCS issued a \$2.7 million small capital Request for Proposals for housing in early 2024 and did not receive any respondents focused on the justice-involved population.
- The County submitted a \$7.7 million grant application in May 2024 to [Disability Rights Washington](#) to fund housing services for *Trueblood* class members. The [Trueblood case](#) was a class action lawsuit against the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services challenging the constitutionality of delays in competency and restoration services for those held in jail. The state's failure to comply with a court order and a settlement agreement resulting from the case have caused millions of dollars in fines to be levied against the state. These dollars are now being directed to fund diversion services, including housing, for those with behavioral health needs. The proposal was initially recommended for approximately \$7 million in funding. Although the County did not receive the grant, the County has been encouraged to reapply when the next Request for Proposals is released.
- Discussions to identify and address funding and service gaps and expand supportive housing are ongoing with state agencies, the Governor's office, legislators, and other counties.
- There are concerns about how federal instability will impact federal funds that the County receives to assist with supportive housing.
 - In March 2025, it was announced that HUD is closing their District 10 office that serves the Pacific Northwest. It is unclear what impact this closure and potential cuts to HUD funding will have on federal housing dollars for Whatcom County projects. The County continues to monitor the situation.

- WCHCS staff toured a model housing facility in California that provides treatment support to help individuals in their long-term recovery where independent housing is not recommended (unrelated to a judicial process).

STRATEGY V: MAKE SYSTEMS CHANGES WITH LOCAL, REGIONAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL PARTNERS

Project 13: Continue to make changes in court systems

The Whatcom County Municipal, District, and Superior Courts are an independent branch of government and maintain their commitment to principles of equality, procedural fairness, perceived fairness, impartiality, and access to justice for every court participant. The judiciary has the authority to control court management and personnel decisions, and to determine the allocation of court resources in accordance with budget realities. While the judiciary is accountable to the people, it must remain free from formal obligations that could compromise their impartiality. Thus, courts and judges act independently in their efforts to improve access to justice, procedural fairness, bail consideration, and the overall efficient management of the courts.

The following information about progress on Project 13 was provided by the various courts who are working to improve their court systems as they see fit. These improvements reflect a broad and meaningful commitment to equality and access to justice that is driven by the judiciary's own constitutional responsibilities to our system of justice.

- Whatcom County District Court:
 - Enabled Zoom participation on civil calendars to reduce barriers for the public.
 - Overhauled local rules to enhance equity and accessibility.
 - Included Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services and Families for Justice to provide meaningful support in sensitive cases.
 - Continued to work closely with the Administrative Office of the Courts to improve interpreter quality and access.
 - Created a procedure pursuant to our Supreme Court's *Blake* directive.
 - Expanded the Domestic Violence Moral Reconation program.
 - Created Whatcom Youth Traffic Court diversion that provides a restorative path.
 - Added an entirely new contested hearing calendar to ensure timely hearings.
 - Improved and expanded the name change calendar and procedures.
 - Established successful "Bench Warrant Quash" days to resolve outstanding warrants, and increase public knowledge and access to court.
 - Continued to develop low-cost jail alternatives for non-mandatory misdemeanors in collaboration with the County Jail and a local organization.
 - Increased access for Civil Court participants by having District courtrooms open to the Northwest Justice Institute's Debt Clinic prior to the civil calendar. This allows court participants to screen for eligibility for low-cost/pro bono attorney assistance.
 - Reduced the small claims backlog from 200+ days to less than 90 days from filing to trial.
 - Arranged with Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center to be present in open courts to offer small claims participants access to services on the morning of their case.
 - Refined the appeals process to ensure timely and effective prosecution.
 - Expanded participation eligibility in Family Recovery Court and Mental Health Therapeutic Court.
- The City of Bellingham has established a Community Court. This option is for select individuals who have committed nonviolent misdemeanors. Case plans are created that link participants to social services as an alternative to incarceration.
- Superior Court continues to develop its Pretrial Services using caseload data, a Public Safety Assessment tool, and pretrial services best practices analysis to screen individuals. This process

provides judges information to help minimize pretrial detention, maximize court appearances, and reduce failure to appear rates.

- Pretrial Services continues to serve District Court and Bellingham, Blaine, Everson, Lynden and Sumas Municipal Courts. These services can include: monitoring good behavior, frequent check-in appointments, court/appointment text reminders, testing for substance use, alcohol and GPS monitoring devices, ignition interlock installation verification, assistance with license plate and weapon surrenders. Pretrial support also is provided for specialized cases (e.g., mental health, high risk domestic violence).
- The courts are continuing to examine issues related to court backlogs including calendaring and continuance requests.
- The Washington Supreme Court is considering a court rule change in light of the recently revised Washington State Bar Association Standards of Indigent Defense. If the Supreme Court adopts standards similar to the State Bar Standards, this would mean lowering caseload limits for public defenders by about two-thirds for felony cases, and more than half for misdemeanor cases. Such a change would require significant and unsustainable additional resources and staffing at all levels of public defense, from Municipal Courts to Superior Courts, and would have a tremendous impact on the County budget. The Public Defender's Office continues to provide updates to the IPRTF.

Project 14: Expedite access to competency restoration services

- Wait times for competency restoration services decreased significantly in 2024 and now meet the requirements for timely access to competency evaluation and restoration (i.e., completing in-jail competency evaluation within 14 days of a court order, and providing inpatient competency restoration services within seven days of a court order).
- As a result, the Competency Restoration Workgroup has been dissolved and focus has shifted to developing a Prosecutorial Diversion Program (i.e., diverting individuals from jail rather than just restoring competency for further criminal proceedings).
- In February 2024, leaders visited the Legal Intervention and Network of Care (LINC) program in Seattle. Supportive housing is a key component of this model program. The funding for *Trueblood* class members described above (Project 12) could make it possible for a program like LINC to be developed in Whatcom County.
- IPRTF's new BCC workgroup will focus on potential implementation of a prosecutorial diversion program.

Project 15: Advocate for a state waiver to allow use of Medicaid funds to pay for medical and behavioral health services for incarcerated individuals

- The Sheriff's Office and Whatcom County Juvenile Court are participating in the Washington State Health Care Authority's Reentry Demonstration Initiative Program. This new initiative provides pre-release services for individuals who are Apple Health (Medicaid) eligible for up to 90 days before their release from jail.
 - Each signed approximately \$2.5 million contracts in capacity-building funding toward implementation of the Medicaid reentry waiver. One million dollars awarded to the Sheriff's Office will be dedicated to IT infrastructure improvements.
 - Work on Medicaid waiver implementation is underway. The Sheriff's Office and Juvenile Court are moving through five milestones towards full implementation in late 2025 or 2026.
 - The County is closely monitoring potential reductions in Medicaid funding which would significantly impact this project.
- Northwest Regional Council has given notice that they will no longer be providing medical services to incarcerated individuals, as of mid-2025. They are working closely with the Executive's Office and WCHCS to plan for a transition in jail nursing services.

OTHER COMMUNITY INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN TO PREVENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM:

- A Justice for Families grant is funding an advocate from Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services to work out of the Courthouse to assist people with protection orders.
- The Way Station Health and Hygiene Center, operated by Unity Care NW, opened in November 2024 and is providing basic hygiene resources and medical respite services for unhoused individuals.
- Cascade Medical Advantage received a grant to administer Medications for Opioid Use Disorder to people who are uninsured, underinsured, or who have Medicaid.

Resources Needed to Further Meet Goals

This section provides:

- Updates on additional funding received since the sales and use tax passed in November 2023.
- Potential funding needs identified thus far.

FUNDING RECEIVED

- The Executive's Office received a \$245,000 Justice Assistance Grant. Funds are being used for a JPOP/IPRTF facilitation contract, hardware and training within the County's IT department, and funding for a consultant to develop an Evaluation and Performance Measurement Plan.
- The Sheriff's Office and the Superior and Juvenile Courts have each signed \$2.5 million capacity-building contracts (total of \$5 million) to implement the Medicaid jail health and reentry waiver.
- Whatcom County received a \$420,000 grant through the Health Care Authority to expand LEAD services.
- The County received \$14.2 million from various sources for capital expenses for a 23-hour Crisis Relief Center.
- A substance use block grant of \$135,000 has been awarded to fund outreach and engagement services for youth and young adults involved in the juvenile court system to lower risk of opioid and substance use disorders.

POTENTIAL NEEDS FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING

- Operational funding for the planned 23-hour Crisis Relief Center.
- Sustaining and expanding the behavioral health staff training program.
- Initiatives to ensure LEAD reaches its originally agreed-upon increased capacity.
- A SUDP embedded in the WCHCS Response Systems Division to provide specialized support for individuals with SUD who are involved with the criminal legal system.
- Continuation of the program embedding a SUDP at the hospital.
- Stipends for people who are not paid by their employer to participate in County committees, task forces, and work groups.
- Updating of the Sequential Intercept Model (SIM): The SIM was last updated in 2022 and there have been numerous changes in the criminal legal system since then. Updating the SIM will inform Implementation Plan projects 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, and 13.

Looking Ahead

The Task Force and its committees will continue to collaborate with the County Council, Executive's Office, and Finance and Facility Advisory Board to monitor progress on all the Implementation Plan projects. Monitoring and reporting efforts will be guided by a commitment to accountability and transparency and based on data. Additionally, the Task Force will ensure there are multiple avenues for providing information and seeking input regarding progress on the Implementation Plan and future planning efforts

from the broad community; Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities; service providers; and people with lived experience. In keeping with the IPRTF's role, the Task Force will work to identify and address policy issues and any needed updates to the Implementation Plan. The IPRTF also will track how federal and state actions affect funding and strategize with the County and community partners about how to minimize potential impacts that may impede future progress on Justice Project implementation priorities.

The progress made to transform Whatcom County's criminal legal system over the past decade is a testament to the commitment and collaboration of Whatcom County leadership, Task Force members, Justice Project partners, the staff of local governments across Whatcom County, service providers, advocates, and a host of community stakeholders. Though much work remains, the progress made is significant and deserving of recognition.

Appendix

APPENDIX A: Roles of Entities Monitoring the Justice Project per Ordinance 2023-039 and the Justice Project Implementation Plan

The Executive's Office will:	The Incarceration Prevention & Reduction Task Force/Law & Justice Council (IPRTF/LJC) will:	The Finance & Facility Advisory Board (FAB) will:	The Justice Project Oversight & Planning (JPOP) Committee will:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and enter into a long-term agreement with Whatcom County cities governing the distribution of sales and use tax revenue collected. (Sec. 5, 1. Specifications for agreement in Sec. 5, 1a.-1e.) 2. Include in agreement, development of a Finance Advisory Board (FAB) (Council to approve membership). (Sec. 5, 2) 3. Coordinate with the cities, WA State Legislature, community-based providers, FAB, and IPRTF/LJC to maximize resources, build capacity, and align plans to accomplish projects. (Sec. 7, 2) 4. With Council, provide the resources needed for the IPRTF/LJC to fulfill its planning, community consultation, and oversight charge. (Sec. 5, 3) 5. Include expenses in biennial and supplemental budgets and budget amendments, as appropriate, to accomplish projects. (Sec. 7, 3) 6. Coordinate with the IPRTF/LJC and FAB to update the Justice Project Implementation Plan (Imp. Plan) with a detailed Spending Plan 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advise the County and cities on policy matters related to law and justice. (Sec. 5, 3) 2. Establish a JPOP Committee (Council to approve membership). (Sec. 5, 3) 3. Coordinate with the Exec's Office, FAB, and others to maximize resources, build capacity, and align plans to accomplish projects. (Sec. 7, 2) 4. With guidance from the JPOP, coordinate with the FAB to monitor progress toward Imp. Plan goals. Provide a written report annually to FAB and Council. (Sec. 5, 3) Monitor progress toward the goals of the Imp. Plan and provide a written and oral report to FAB and Council no less than annually. (Sec. 9, 1, includes specifications for report) 5. With JPOP, provide recommendations for plan updates a minimum of every five years. (Sec. 5, 3) 6. Coordinate with the Exec. and FAB to update the Imp. Plan with a detailed Spending Plan no less than every two years. (Sec. 8, 1) 7. Coordinate with Exec. and FAB to update the Imp. Plan no less than every five years. (Sec. 8, 2) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide financial oversight of funds collected from sales and use tax. (Sec. 5, 2) Monitor the spending of the Public Health, Safety, and Justice Tax. (Sec. 9, 2) 2. Make recommendations on the finance and operations of the jail, behavioral health, and supportive housing facilities and services. (Sec. 5, 2) 3. Coordinate with the Exec's Office, IPRTF/LJC, and others to maximize resources, build capacity, and align plans to accomplish projects. (Sec. 7, 2) 4. Provide a written and oral report no less than annually to the IPRTF/LJC and Council on the financial performance of the fund and associated programs. (Sec. 9, 2, includes specifications for report) 5. Coordinate with the Exec. and IPRTF/LJC to update the Imp. Plan with a detailed Spending Plan no less than every two years. (Sec. 8, 1) 6. Coordinate with the Exec. and IPRTF/LJC to update the Imp. Plan no less than every five years. (Sec. 8, 2) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide guidance to the IPRTF/LJC regarding monitoring the progress of the Imp. Plan. (Sec. 5, 3) 2. Provide recommendations for plan updates a minimum of every five years. (Sec. 5, 3) <p>From the Implementation Plan (pgs. 21-22):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The JPOP Committee will help ensure the Imp. Plan is updated as needed, and that public engagement and communications are robust. • Participate in the development of an evaluation plan to measure progress and results. • Prepare an annual report to be included as part of the IPRTF/LJC annual report. • Make report accessible to the public.

The Executive's Office will:	The Incarceration Prevention & Reduction Task Force/Law & Justice Council (IPRTF/LJC) will:	The Finance & Facility Advisory Board (FAB) will:	The Justice Project Oversight & Planning (JPOP) Committee will:
<p>no less than every two years. (Sec. 8, 1)</p> <p>7. Coordinate with the IPRTF/LJC and FAB to update the Imp. Plan no less than every five years. (Sec. 8, 2, includes specifications for analysis)</p> <p>8. With IPRTF and Council, consult with the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission on progress and planning efforts, esp. as it relates to data gathered on racially disparate impacts in the criminal justice system, and recommendations to eliminate barriers to public participation. (Sec. 5, 5)</p>	<p>8. Transmit the Imp. Plan to Council for approval. (Sec. 8, 2)</p> <p>9. Evaluate representation of BIPOC communities and people with criminal justice lived experience in its membership and ensure adequate representation. (Sec. 5, 4)</p> <p>10. Consult BIPOC communities, service providers, and people with lived experience in the progress of Imp. Plan and future planning efforts. (Sec. 5, 5)</p> <p>11. With Exec. Office and Council, consult with the Whatcom Racial Equity Commission on progress and planning efforts, especially as it relates to data gathered on racially disparate impacts in the criminal justice system, and recommendations to eliminate barriers to public participation. (Sec. 5, 5)</p> <p>12. Participate in development of a population health report that includes a public health and safety component, in collaboration with the local community health advisory board and Community Health Improvement Plan process. (Sec. 5, 3)</p>	<p>From the Implementation Plan (pg. 23):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make report accessible to the public. 	