



# State of Whatcom County Superior Court

**Presiding Judge**

David E. Freeman

# Whatcom County Superior Court Bench

## 5 Elected Judges

All general jurisdiction judges

One position funded by the State through the WRIA 1 adjudication

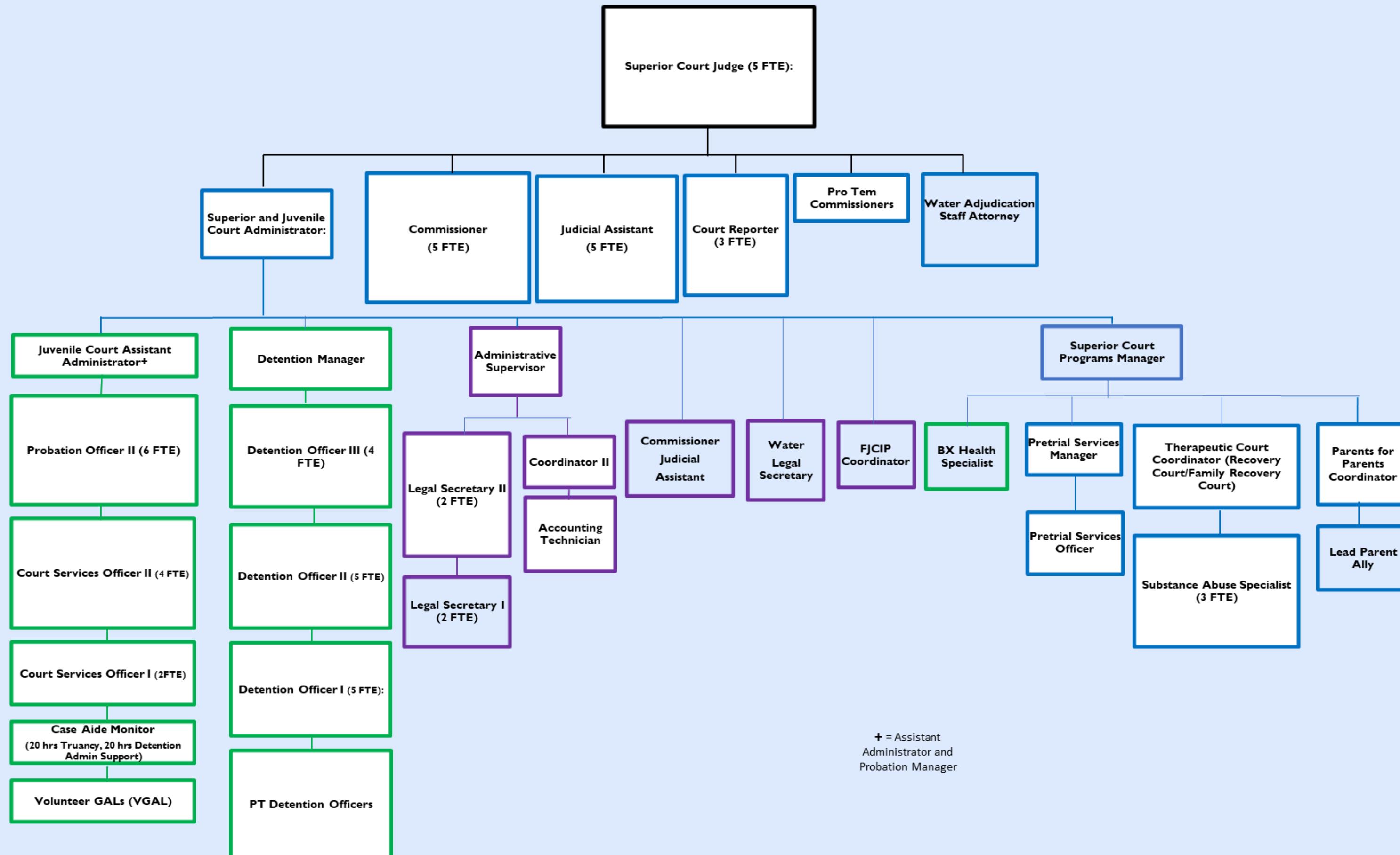
## 5 Commissioners appointed by the Judges

3 Constitutional commissioners

2 statutory commissioners

1 Commissioner funded by the State through the WRIA 1 adjudication

# Superior Court Administration Organization Chart Judicial Branch



# What We Do

## We are a court of general jurisdiction

Criminal - Adult felony matters

Civil – Civil disputes over 100k and/or involving real property

Probate – Probate and adult guardianship/conservatorship matters

Family Law – Dissolutions of marriage, parenting plans, child support

Juvenile Department – Juvenile offender, dependency, minor guardianship, BECCA and BH Specialist

Appeals – Administrative, land use, and appeals from courts of limited jurisdiction (District and municipal courts)

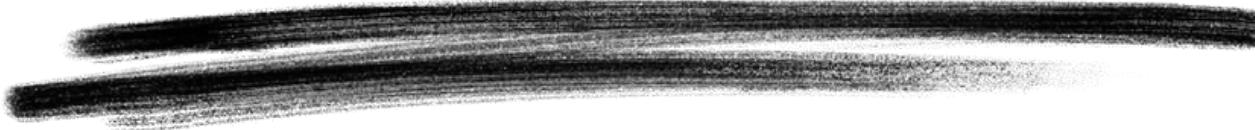
WRIA 1 – General water rights adjudication for Water Resource Inventory Area 1

Juvenile Detention

Superior Court Programs – Pretrial Services, Therapeutic Courts, P4P



# Caseloads and Trials



- General trajectory of more filings and more cases going to trial
- Changes in law have reduced number of dependency filings but, dramatically increased minor guardianships
- Minor guardianships mean more unrepresented litigants, less agency oversight, more Court oversight, and additional court costs
- Changes in law to protection orders
- Dramatic increase in filings requiring additional commissioner time and pro tem calendars
- WRIA 1 General Water Rights Adjudication
  - Filed in 2024, more than 30K summoned

# Superior Court Caseload

	Criminal	Civil	Domestic	Probate/ Guardianshi p	Adoption/ Parentage	Mental Illness/ Alcohol	Juvenile Dependenc y	Juvenile Offender	Total Filings for Year
<b>2018</b>	1,721	2,277	769	631	132	221	657	311	6,719
<b>2019</b>	1,542	2,364	835	714	131	224	660	229	6,699
<b>2020</b>	1,626	1,306	700	664	87	222	340	167	5,112
<b>2021</b>	1,270	1,316	726	1,029	84	252	398	133	5,238
<b>2022</b>	1,463	1,617	686	1,233	91	270	602	166	6,128
<b>2023</b>	1,483	1,894	788	1,204	80	252	448	192	6,341
<b>2024</b>	1,486	2,283	748	1,165	155	225	599	201	6,862
<b>2025</b>	1,344	4,506	774	1,259	137	244	518	239	9,021

Numbers reflect new cases filed for the calendar year. They do not account for cases that were filed in previous years and have not yet been resolved. This count does not reflect the claims filed in the WRIA 1 Water Adjudication. As of the week of Jan 1st , there were approximately 1,500 of the 35,000 potential claims filed.

# Trials

## Criminal Jury Trials

	2024	2025
Jury Trials	13	17

## Civil Jury Trials

	2024	2025
Jury Trials	3	6

**Additional Occurrences** when a Jury was Called but Case was Resolved, Proceeded to Bench Trial, or Continued the Morning of Trial

	2024	2025
Criminal	13	18
Civil	2	4

# *Changing Practices*

## **Shift from siloed Departments to practical collaboration between Departments**

- Assignments- Looking beyond the assigned Department
- Communication- Establishing culture of open communication between Departments
- Planning- Looking beyond the trial date

# Pre-Trial Services

- Validation of Risk Assessment Tool
- Structural Improvements
- Procedural Improvements
- Data Collection
- Partnerships



# Adult Recovery Court

## -Successes

More participants  
More graduations

## -Challenges

Capacity



	2024	2025
Admissions	26	36
Successful Completions	13	22
Discharges	16 (4 terminated for new offenses, 12 terminated for FTA)	2 (2 terminated for FTA)
Notes	18 participants completed program with stable housing and current work/education and 2 petitioned the court for a work/education alternative	13 participants completed program with stable housing and current work/education

# Juvenile Court Improvement

FJCIP Family Juvenile Court Improvement Program

“Our mission is to support positive family outcomes by cultivating trust, engagement, diversity of perspectives, and mutual respect.”

- In 2025, Whatcom County Superior Court implemented our local Family Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP), making Whatcom one of 15 counties in Washington State using the FJCIP model to transform local court systems and improve outcomes for children and families.
- The Whatcom County FJCIP court team is made up of a dedicated judicial officer, the FJCIP coordinator and local system partners, including attorneys, social workers, lived experts and other professionals working in dependency court.
- The Whatcom County FJCIP court team uses data, research, and the experience of peer courts across the state to identify opportunities for improvement and monitor effectiveness of court improvement projects.

# WRIA 1 Water Adjudication

- 30k summoned defendants
- Only second general adjudication in the State
- Projected length of 15-20 years
- Ebb and flow of the statutory process presents both challenges and opportunities for the Court in allocating services

# Community Outreach

- Reunification Day
- Law Day
- Teen Court
- Mock Trials
- Traveling Water Court and Outreach
- Color of Justice
- Title 11 Training
- Recovery Court Picnic

# Adoption Day 2025

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# Family Reunification Day



# Court Expansion

- 2024 added fifth judge funded through adjudication
- New Courtroom
- JAVS installations
- AOC judicial needs survey
- Court structure and executive committee

# Challenges

- Data
- Detention Staffing
- Unfunded mandates
- Attorney shortages
- Court reporter shortage
- Court Security

