

Superior Court of the State of Washington

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February 17, 2023

Members of Council,

I am writing to you in my role as Whatcom County Superior Court Judge for Department 4. I want to address the issue of courthouse security, and potential funding currently before our legislature to assist in our efforts to ensure that our courthouse remains safe and secure.

So many small and rural courthouses in economically distressed parts of Washington State do not meet basic security standards. State funding is needed to close the gap between what local governments can afford with their very limited revenue and small tax bases to ensure the safety of their courthouses in their communities.

Adequate security is particularly significant during these challenging times of heightened threats to the security of government buildings. Courthouses are the hub of civic life where disputes are resolved by the rule of law. Court proceedings can be emotional events and courts are reporting an increase in security disturbances and serious threats to judicial officers and court employees. In my role as a Superior Court Judge I feel fortunate to have a legislative and executive branch of government that supports our judicial branch of government and share a common goal for providing that our courthouse remains safe and secure for all of those who visit it. However, as you know we are not immune from issues of courthouse security. Recently, there was a significant breach of our courthouse by an individual who managed to gain unauthorized access for an extended period over a weekend. The breach resulted in significant damage to the building, including my own chambers. Where, an attempt to light a fire and a device consisting of shotgun shells were left for me to find on Monday morning.

Fortunately, facilities, the Whatcom County District and Superior Courts, the Executive, and the Sheriff's Department immediately, and diligently, have worked to improve and address security concerns stemming from this breach. As a

judicial officer I am not directly involved in the funding decisions that go into these improvements. But, I certainly understand that they cost money.

Please support this funding request currently before our State Legislature to create the Small and Rural Courthouse Matching Grant Program so that courts in lower-resourced jurisdictions can hire private court security staff and purchase equipment for weapon screening, security cameras, duress alarms, and emergency notification systems that address the unique security needs of each courthouse. This funding of \$2.5 million annually will give local courts and governments the resources to improve public safety in their courthouses.

Having County Council affirm to our State leaders that courthouse security will be legislative priority at the local level will help ensure that these matching funds will be available to Whatcom County and all of our small and rural courts. I appreciate your attention to this crucial need to protect public safety in courthouses.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Freeman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Freeman
Superior Court Judge