

DISTRICT/MUNICIPAL COURT LIAISON COMMITTEE

NEWSLETTER

On March 29, 2018 the committee had its regularly scheduled meeting.

Judge Elizabeth Verhey of the Tacoma Municipal Court, announced she will be retiring at the end of 2018. Judge Verhey has 25 ½ years of service in both Pierce County District Court and the Tacoma Municipal Court. Judge Verhey has been and continues to be an outstanding member of the Pierce County bench. Congratulations on her outstanding career and service to Pierce County and the City of Tacoma.

Judge James Heller is officially retiring after a career that span many decades. Judge Heller served Pierce County District Court and the citizens of Pierce County with distinction and honor for many years.

Judge Margaret Ross has announced that she is retiring at the end of the year. Judge Ross came to the bench from the Pierce County Prosecutor's office. Judge Ross was first appointed as a District Court Commissioner. When the Commissioner position was eliminated she successfully ran for Pierce County District Court Judge. Judge Ross has faithfully served the citizens of Pierce County throughout her legal career and she will be missed.

Charles Ramey, Pierce County District Court Administrator, informed the committee of many changes in District Court. Room 839 has been renovated and now has a jury box and is available for trials. After years of sitting idle the 5th floor of the County-City Building will be the site for three new court rooms for use by the District Court. Future plans include re-locating Pierce County District Court Probation to the 6th Floor of the County-City Building. The newly created Resource Center is in full operation and is currently located on the 1st floor of the Hess Building located across the street from the Court house. Although the County's future plans include tearing down the Hess Building, there is a \$600,000 contract to renovate the 995 building and the Resource Center will be relocated to that structure once the renovations have been completed. The Resource Center will house service providers across a broad spectrum of needs. There will be assistance in the areas of access to housing and access to mental health services. The Resource Center also accepts donations of clean clothing, coats and jackets, shoes and accessories such as back packs, purses and wallets.

Much of the funds utilized in creating and sustaining the Resource Center come Pierce County. Congratulations to the County and the courts for finding innovative ways to fund services for individuals in the criminal justice system who are homeless, mentally challenged affected by substance abuse and/or poverty. Although the Resource Center has not been operating long there are already a number of success stories generated from its existence.

Mr. Ramey after 42 years of combined service to courts in California and Pierce County District Court announced his retirement as of April 27, 2018. Mr. Ramey steered the Pierce County District Court through some significant administrative changes in his tenure. From administering to the Narrows Bridge toll violations to developing an on-line presence in communicating with the court, Mr. Ramey has been a steady guiding hand in ensuring that the Pierce County District Court remains one of the most efficient court systems in Washington State. Mr. Ramey's replacement will have large shoes to fill.

Bryce Nelson, Pierce County Deputy Prosecutor, gave the committee an update on the Dart program. This program has increased its numbers dramatically. At the present time there are approximately 120 participants. The DART program continues to generate a great number of successful participants. Success in this program can be life changing for the participants and those individuals close to them.

The new Veterans' Court is scheduled to begin this April. Pierce County District Court now has the DART program, and is soon to begin a Veteran's Court.

There has been a change in the way shoplifting cases can be processed by the County. The Pierce County Sheriff's office is training loss prevention officers to write reports and submit them directly to the Prosecutor's office through the South Sound 911 communication system. This will undoubtedly free up Deputies who have an immense geographical area to cover with a limited number of law enforcement officers.

Sheriff Paul Pastor reports that the Pierce County Sheriff's Office has brought on board Mental Health Co-Responders. The Sheriff is very pleased to have this resource available and hopes that more co-responders will be available in the future.

Pierce County Center for Dialog and Resolution is once again hosting an Open House with a fairy tale theme. This is good hearted fun with fairy tale morals that relate to their mission of encouraging dialog as a means to resolving issues. The Open House is scheduled for April 19, 2018. There are also training opportunities at the Center and everyone is encouraged to check their website for dates and times. <https://centerforresolution.org/>

The Tacoma Police Department has created an outreach program comprised of 4 patrol officers. This team is tasked with engaging the homeless and establishing a rapport with them. In doing so they will be better equipped to assist them in finding resources in housing and mental health. Their presence will decrease the need for regular patrol officers to respond to calls involving this population wherein the officer has no knowledge of the unique characteristics of these individuals.

In every aspect of the Pierce county criminal justice system the need for more resources and attention to the problems of homelessness, mental health, substance abuse, physical abuse and poverty have been recognized and most importantly active steps have been taken to address

these problems. To all those who undertake this often thankless endeavor, thank you for your service.

The District/Municipal Court Liaison Committee's next meeting is tentatively scheduled for May 24, 2018, 7:30 AM at the Harvester Restaurant located at 29 N Tacoma Avenue. All are welcome.