Justice Court

Mission Statement

The mission of the Davis County Justice Court is to provide the people with an open, fair, efficient and independent forum for the advancement of justice under the law.

Prior Year Inputs/Outputs

FTE (2022):

Until 26 August 2022 the court was operating under pandemic restrictions imposed by the Utah Judicial Council.

Since 13 September 2021 we have been working personally in the office and have handled approximately **6,231 hearings** (approximately 31 hearings per day).

Since September 13 2021 we have utilized our Judge-Facilitated Mediation Program to assist in the resolution of cases set for jury trial. **Presently we do not have a backlog of jury trials** to conduct.

Since September 2021 we have conducted numerous bench trials. Currently we have 9 bench trials scheduled. **Presently we do not have a backlog of bench trials** to conduct.

Since September 2021 we have conducted 116 Small Claims trials. Currently **we do not have a backlog of small claims hearings.**

Core Functions & Services

The core function of any court, including the Davis County Justice Court, is to provide an impartial forum for dispute resolution.

This core function includes: ensuring access to the court process for all who seek to use it; managing the business of the court in a manner that promotes efficiency, transparency, fairness, timeliness for court patrons and working with other law enforcement entities to develop strategies that combine the interests of all three branches of government.

The core function affects Davis County and its citizens by giving them an effective and efficient forum to resolve disputes. No entity is denied access to the court's process. Because the court manages its business efficiently court users have the opportunity for fair and timely dispute resolution. Finally, working with other law enforcement entities, e.g., prosecutors, public defenders, and law enforcement agencies, the court has and is developing strategies that combine the interests of county and municipal government for the benefit of all citizens and visitors.

Justice Court

Current Year Projected Outcomes

The court does not generate income by producing "widgets." The income that the court generates is the result of fines and fees that are imposed from convictions in cases that are filed by law enforcement, e.g. local police officers, county sheriffs, highway patrol troopers, and prosecuting attorneys. A reduction in the number of cases filed *or* the inability of defendants to pay fines and fees affects the court's "bottom line." This year the number of cases is up a little from last year, i.e., ten percent (10%), one thousand five (1,005) cases or approximately eighty-four (84) cases per month.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect the number of cases filed *and* defendants' ability to pay, the court has been imposing fines and setting payments at rates that defendants can afford and pay given input about their income and budgets. The court has been granting extensions to pay fines and fees. We have been closely monitoring the status of existing fines and fees and only letting cases become ninety (90) days delinquent before initiating "collection processes," i.e., Orders to Show Cause or Review Hearings. (This type of "collection process" is not commonly used by many district or justice courts. Insead these courts use the Utah Office of State Debt Collection (OSDC) to collect their outstanding fines and fees. The OSDC places the collection of court fines and fees very low on its priority list and is reported to collect approximately twenty percent (20%) of any outstanding fine or fee). As always, we have a statutory obligation to substitute community service hours in lieu of fines and fees and, when necessary, are making those substitutions.

Review of the "revenue" generated by the court in 2022 shows that we are on pace to collect approximately 1.9 millon dollars. The total amount that will be retained by the county will be approximately 1.1 million dollars. The remaining $800,000.00 will be distributed to Farmington, Kaysville, and the state. These "revenue" figures are a little higher than last year.

Next Year Budget Initiatives

We are grateful for the hard work that was done by the Budget Committee, the Human Resource Department and the Commission last year. Thank you for the pay increases that the employees of the Justice Court received in 2021.

This year we hope to continue providing the very best in "customer service" to the stakeholders, i.e., local police officers, county sheriffs, highway patrol troopers and prosecuting attorneys, public defenders, private attorneys, and county residents and visitors. To do that we must have judicial assistants that are competent and work hard.

The Utah Judicial Council recently approved a Judicial Assistant Certification Program and our current team of judicial assistants are all working toward becoming "state certified" in court work.

Justice Court

Since the last budget was approved we have had two judicial assistants leave the court. That is 28% of the staff. With the help of HR, we have been through five complete pools of applicants to find replacements. Several very qualified applicants would not accept an offer of employment for the wage we were approved to pay them. We did find one applicant that would work for a rate we could pay her and she is developing into a very knowledgeable and productive judicial assistant.

Recently, the state approved an 18.5% increase in judicial assistant compensation. Several justice courts continue to offer wages at a rate higher than ours. Once we make hiring decisions, extend offers and accept replacements approximately sixty-two percent (62%) of our staff will have less than three (3) years of court experience. None of them will be paid what they might make at other state or justice court jobs along the Wasatch Front. As a result we will be in a "hire, train and repeat" cycle until we become more competitive in wages and can keep our own trained employees.

This kind of disparity and experience affects the culture that we are trying to create and maintain in the court. It affects the morale of the employees who are "left behind." And, it affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the court to meet the needs of all court users. We hope and ask that the Budget Committee, Human Resources and the Commission will continue to review judicial assistants' pay rates and make necessary adjustments to bring the Davis County Justice into alignment with other courts.