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King County Department of Public Defense

Overview

- What We Do
- Brief History of DPD
- Courts, Units/Case Types, Locations
- Transition from Supplemental Credits to Case Weighting
- Felony Case Weight Distribution
- Case-Weight Credit Policy
- Felony Assignment Tachometer
- Credits vs. Staffing
- Advice and Support to Other Defender Offices

What We Do.

100%

of clients represented

- We represent adults and children who are charged with a crime in King County and Seattle (Adult Felony, Adult Misdemeanor [District Court and SMC], and Juvenile Defense).
- We represent parents and children involved in the child welfare system (dependency and termination petitions) (Family Defense).
- We represent individuals subject to involuntary commitment (ITA, SCU).
- We represent indigent individuals who owe child support to the custodial parent or the state (CoC).
- We represent individuals who face jail for contempt (*Knight* warnings).

DPD History

Non-Profit Model

Historically, public defense in King County operated out of a small office called the Office of Public Defense which contracted through a patchwork non-profit agencies. Four principle non-profits were responsible for the majority of public defense: Associated Counsel for the Accused, Northwest Defenders Association, Society of Counsel Representing Accused Persons, and The Defender Association.

State v. Dolan

A class action lawsuit claimed that the employees of the non-profits were actually county employees. The WA Supreme Court agreed.

DPD

As a result of that decision, the County decided to start a public defense office on July 1, 2013. DPD adopted all of the staff at the nonprofits and maintained the ethical walls between each law firm. DPD currently runs 4 separate law firms that represent each prior non-profit: ACAD, NDD, SCRAPD, and TDAD.

- Courts
  - King County Superior Court
    - Juvenile
      - Family Treatment Court
    - Civil Commitment
      - Involuntary Treatment
      - Sex Offender Commitment
    - Adult Criminal
      - Drug Court
  - King County District Court
    - Mental Health Court
      - Veterans Court
  - Seattle Municipal Court
    - Mental Health Court

What and where?

- Locations
  - King County Courthouse
    - Superior Court
    - District Court
  - Regional Justice Center Courthouse (Kent)
    - Superior Court
    - District Court
  - Redmond District Court
  - Burien/Issaquah District Court
  - Seattle Municipal Court
  - King County Jail (Seattle)
    - Jail Courtroom – KCJ1 and KCJ2
  - Harborview Hospital
    - Superior Court
  - Children and Family Justice Center (CCFJC)
    - Superior Court

What and where?

- Units/Case Types
  - Adult Felony (Seattle and Kent)
  - Adult Misdemeanor – District Court (Seattle, Kent, Redmond)
  - Adult Misdemeanor – Seattle Municipal Court
  - ITA (Harborview)
  - Family Defense (Seattle and Kent)
  - Juvenile (CCFJC)
  - Treatment Courts (Drug Court, MHC x2, Veteran's Court, Family Treatment Court)
  - Contempt of Court (Child Support Enforcement)
  - CHINS/Becca/ARY/Truancy

What and where?

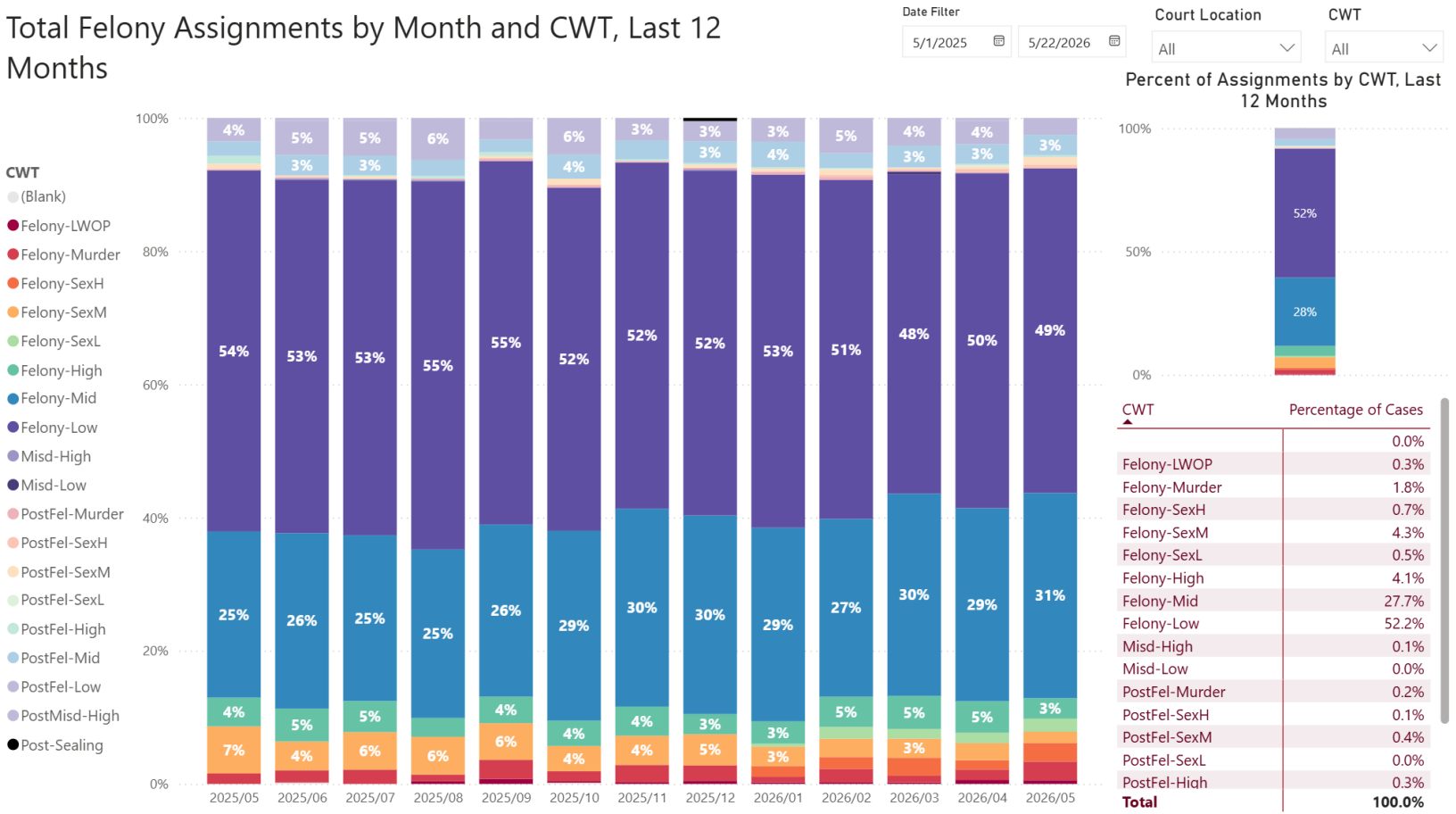
National Public Defense Workload Study (NPDWS) (2023)
The ABA and Rand Corp. collaborated on a landmark workload study that looked at how much time it should take to represent a client faced with different charges. It involved reviewing and analyzing 17 separate workload studies over a 17-year period to determine appropriate workloads. The NPDWS mapped offenses by type to determine how long each charge should take to defend on average.

WSBA (2024)
The Washington State Supreme Court asked the WSBA to review their Standards for Indigent Defense Services in light of the new NPDWS. WSBA reviewed the study and mapped the case-weight tiers (classification of offenses) to Washington statutes. They obtained insights from defense, prosecution, judicial officers, and public hearings. It identified a four-phase process to reach the NPDWS standards.

Washington State Supreme Court (2024)
The Washington State Supreme Court held hearings for public comment on proposed changes to their Standards enshrined in CrR 3.1/CrRLJ 3.1/JuCR 9.2. The Supreme Court issued three orders on the standards with the last one including changes to the court rule effective January 1, 2026.

DPD
As a result of the WSBA standards change and the Washington State Supreme Court changes, DPD has adopted a new case-weight credit model to determine assignments to lawyers. This was a departure from our prior supplemental credit policy. In anticipation of these changes, DPD identified key technical requirements to determine workload and preliminarily adopted case-weighting in 2024. On July 1, 2025, DPD became the first office state-wide to draft and implement a case-weight credit policy manual that implemented Phase I of the WSBA standards. On January 1, 2026, DPD made additional adjustments to comply with the Washington State Supreme Court Orders. DPD is preparing to release its updated case-weight credit policy manual for July 1, 2026. DPD has provided both technical assistance and advice to other offices across the country and has provided our case-weight credit policy manual to other offices looking adopt a similar practice.

Transition.



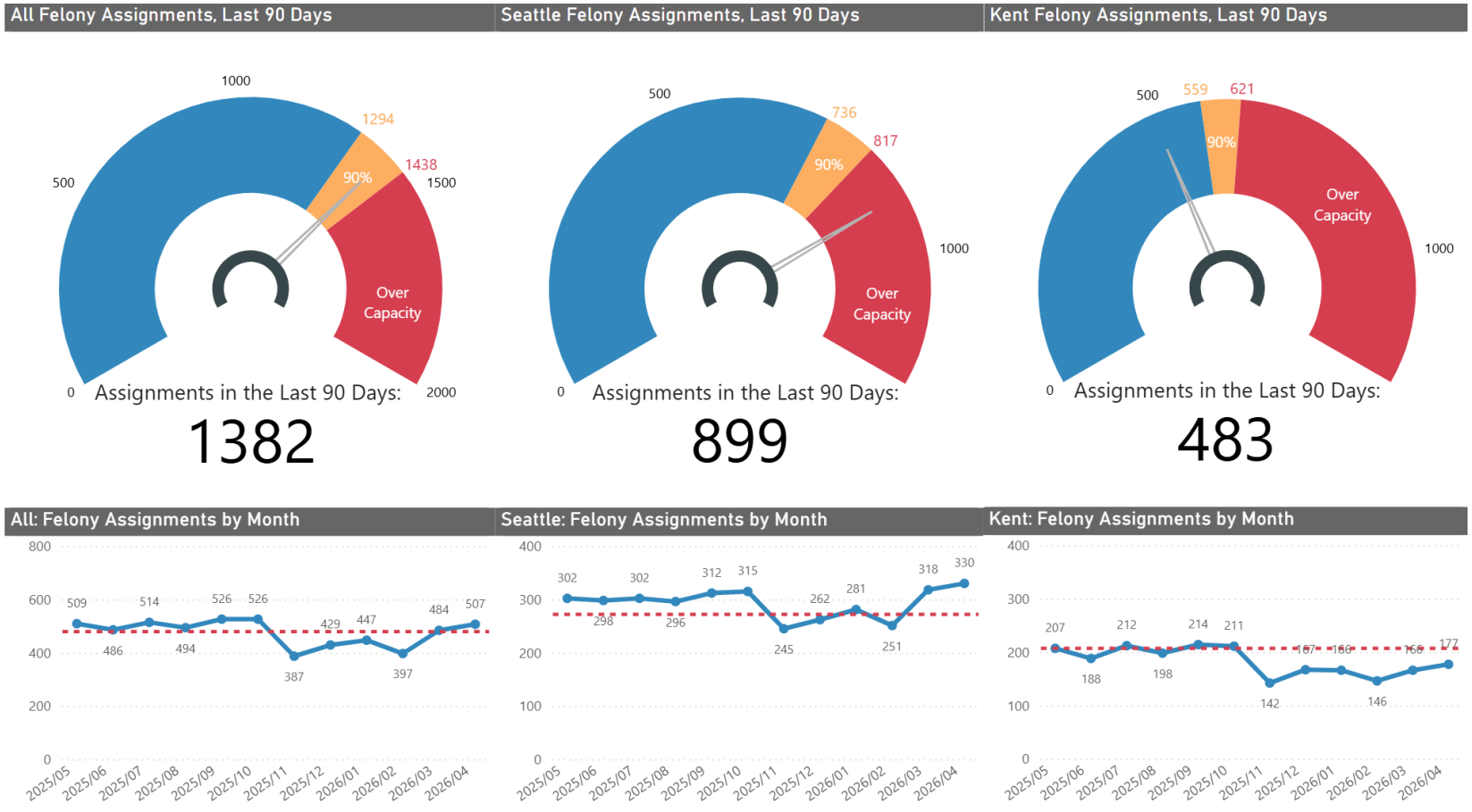
CWT	Percentage of Cases
	0.0%
Felony-LWOP	0.3%
Felony-Murder	1.8%
Felony-SexH	0.7%
Felony-SexM	4.3%
Felony-SexL	0.5%
Felony-High	4.1%
Felony-Mid	27.7%
Felony-Low	52.2%
Misd-High	0.1%
Misd-Low	0.0%
PostFel-Murder	0.2%
PostFel-SexH	0.1%
PostFel-SexM	0.4%
PostFel-SexL	0.0%
PostFel-High	0.3%
Total	**100.0%**

Felony Case Weighting

- WSBA categorizes cases into 10 major case-weight tiers.
- Each case-weight tier corresponds to a felony credit that represents its presumed workload (1-8 credits)
- On average, in King County, 52% of the cases we have assigned over the last 12 months has been a Felony Low as classified by the WSBA.
- Felony Low and Felony Mid represent approximately 80% of the cases we assign.

Case-Weight Credit Policy Manual

- 35 Page Document
- Explains the mathematical framework and reasoning for each credit tied to the WSBA Standards.
- Addresses how transfers work and areas where policies make the work more efficient.
- Roadmap for other offices trying to do the same thing.
- Provided to other defender offices.

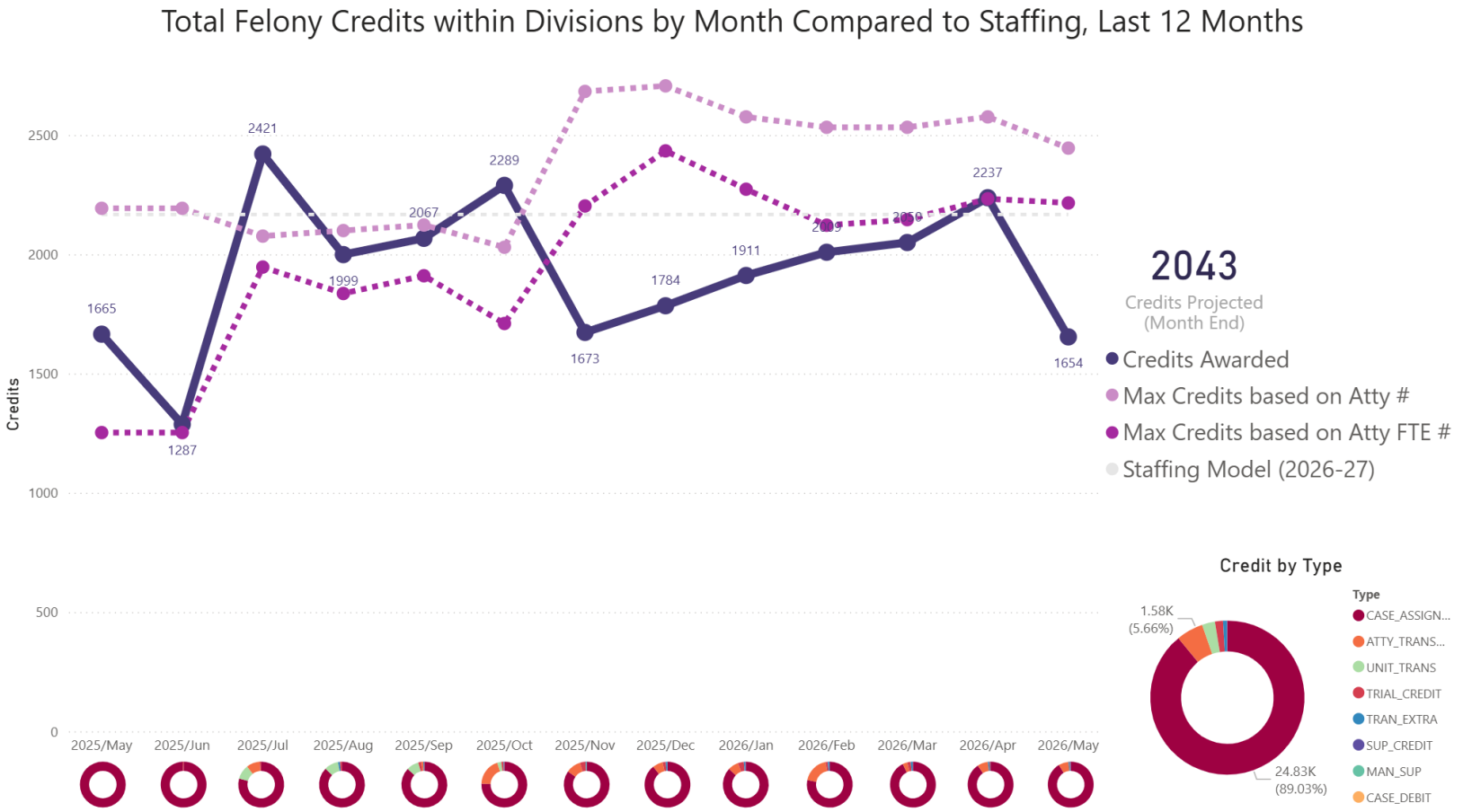


Felony Assignment Tachometer

- Allows us to see the distribution connected to our modeling so we can adjust staffing.
- Allows tracking of splits:
  - Overall matching modeling, but Seattle higher than proportion modeled.

Credits vs. Staffing

- Credit = workload.
- Ideal vs. Actual.
- Ensure representation for each client.
- Allows tracking of credit reasons to allow us to identify future efficiencies or problems.



Advice and Support to Other Defender Offices.

Q&A