King County

KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

DECEMBER 1, 2023

Follow-up on Courthouse Security Screening Audit

The King County Sheriff's Office's Courthouse Protection Unit (CPU), the Department of Executive Services' Facilities Management Division's (FMD) Security Unit, and King County Superior Court made incremental progress in aligning procedures and improving courthouse safety. The CPU built on initial progress over the past year, with CPU's procedures now on an annual review schedule. In addition, CPU, FMD Security Unit, and Superior Court continued collaboratively working together to address the requirements of Washington State Courts General Rule 36 covering trial court security. These ongoing efforts improve the safety of courthouse staff and patrons by ensuring that the three parties are effectively communicating with one another in responding to security requests and addressing potential security risks.

Beyond procedure alignment, there has been little progress addressing recommendations, missing opportunities to ensure the safety of courthouse patrons and county staff. Despite the work completed since the December 2022 follow-up, the status of the seven remaining audit recommendations is unchanged—primarily due to inconsistencies in procedures. The FMD Security Unit did not update its procedures in 2023 as planned, in turn limiting the alignment and coordination of roles between CPU and the FMD Security Unit. And, though improved, CPU's procedures are still missing specific directions for courthouse patrons. Completing the remaining audit recommendations requires collaboration between CPU and the FMD Security Unit, which depends on each group first completing updates to their procedures. Focused effort on procedures would complete three recommendations and significantly advance completion of three more, and ensure that CPU and FMD continue working together to increase courthouse security.

Of the eight audit recommendations:

1 DONE	6 PROGRESS	1 OPEN
FULLY IMPLEMENTED Auditor will no longer monitor.	PARTIALLY IMPLEMENTED Auditor will continue to monitor.	REMAIN UNRESOLVED Auditor will continue to monitor.

Please see details below for implementation status of each recommendation.

Recommendation 1

OPEN

The Sheriff's Office Court Protection Unit should develop, document, and implement a randomized weapons testing program and include it in its standard operating procedures. The program should include recurring random testing at all courthouse locations at defined intervals. Once implemented, the Court Protection Unit should measure the effectiveness of screening to detect test items.

STATUS UPDATE: The CPU has not made progress on this recommendation since the last audit follow-up (December 2022). CPU screeners and marshals continue to check screening equipment daily as specified in their standard operating procedures, but do not conduct randomized (i.e., unannounced and unknown to the screener) tests for weapons or other prohibited materials. Conducting random testing of screening effectiveness is best practice, but CPU managers expressed concern that doing so would violate the terms of the screeners labor contract. Sheriff's Office leadership commented that these concerns should not be a categorical barrier to implementing randomized testing and will address these concerns in 2024.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the Sheriff's Office should implement a randomized testing program of CPU screening. Randomized testing is best practice because it ensures that the procedures, when used successfully, find and prevent weapons from entering secure facilities. Without random testing, the sufficiency of CPU's procedures is unknown—and, therefore, unreliable. Increasing the reliability of screening would result in a safer courthouse.

Recommendation 2

PROGRESS

The Sheriff's Office Court Protection Unit and Facilities Management Division King County Security Unit should clarify roles and responsibilities for screening and security operations and ensure that their respective policies and procedures are aligned.

STATUS UPDATE: As explained in the audit report, we heard multiple examples from CPU and FMD Security Unit staff where operational expectations between the two were not met, resulting in safety risks. In concurring with this recommendation, the parties planned to hold "three consecutive meetings … to develop a report." During the last audit follow up (December 2022), we explained that a stand-alone report was not necessary; rather, procedure updates by each referencing one another's operational roles, along with ongoing coordination meetings, would address the recommendation if the parties aligned with one another. In response, the FMD Security Unit planned to update its procedures to address its operational duties with CPU marshals and screeners. However, the FMD Security Unit did not complete this work as planned in 2023 but reports it will do so in 2024.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the FMD Security Unit should complete the updates to its procedures that specify its operational roles and responsibilities regarding CPU—particularly in responding to alerts and requests for assistance. CPU and the FMD Security Unit should then review each other's procedures, find any areas of inconsistency or concern, and address them as part of their coordination meetings.

Recommendation 3

PROGRESS

King County Superior Court, Sheriff's Office, and Facilities Management Division should together review Washington State Courts General Rule 36 and determine how the County meets each of the rule's requirements, identify who is responsible for each requirement, and identify whether there are any gaps.

STATUS UPDATE: CPU, the FMD Security Unit, and Superior Court together, though action items in Court Security Committee meetings and the Court Security Plan's incorporation of CPU's and FMD Security Unit's procedures, made progress on this recommendation in the prior follow-up period. However, the requirement to perform "security audits" at least every three years per General Rule 36(g)(3) remains. The three groups discussed this requirement as part of their coordination meetings and are developing an approach to carry out the security audit in 2024 through review of the Court Security Plan. The work may result in updates to the Court Security Plan itself, or as updates to guidance in policies and procedures referenced in the Plan.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, CPU, FMD Security Unit, and Superior Court staff should carry out the security audit work in 2024, including any updates to procedures or other plans referenced in the Court Security Plan.

Recommendation 4

On December 1, 2022 DONE

Recommendation 5

PROGRESS

The Sheriff's Office should include efficiency as a goal in the Court Protection Unit standard operating procedures.

STATUS UPDATE: Recommendations 5, 6, and 7 directly address essential elements of the CPU's screening operations. See the narrative in Recommendation 7, below.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the Sheriff's Office should reference efficiency as a point of guidance in its screening standard operating procedures.

Recommendation 6

PROGRESS

The Sheriff's Office should develop and implement standard operating procedures that encourage screeners at the magnetometer to pass people to secondary screeners and avoid having people go through the magnetometer multiple times whenever possible.

STATUS UPDATE: Recommendations 5, 6, and 7 directly address essential elements of the CPU's screening operations. See the narrative in Recommendation 7, below.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, CPU should review its screening standard operating procedures and ensure consistency in guidance among the procedures, training manual, new hire training checklist, and any other procedural directives.

Recommendation 7

PROGRESS

The Sheriff's Office should develop clear and consistent verbal instructions for security screeners that minimizes confusion about how to unload trays.

STATUS UPDATE: Recommendations 5, 6, and 7 directly address essential elements of the CPU's screening operations. In our December 2022 follow up, we reviewed the best practices supporting each of the three recommendations in individual detail. As part of this follow up, CPU staff shared their updated procedures and explained that they plan to continue updating them annually. Although the 2023 procedure changes improved clarity, they did not fully address the requirements of the three audit recommendations. During their next annual procedure review and update, the Sheriff's Office could address all three recommendations in one targeted effort.

As explained in the audit, the three recommendations each address interrelated components of the efficiency of the screening process to avoid delays and improve the quality of screening. First, the speed of the screening line is affected by the magnetometer as a choke point. Procedures that eliminate unnecessary delays at the magnetometer (Recommendation 6) improve the efficiency of the screening line (Recommendation 5). This is accomplished through consistent, detailed procedures that specify each step of the screening process, along with consistent verbal direction to those being screened (Recommendation 7). Updates to procedures and staff training references featuring the same consistent, detailed steps and directions would address all three recommendations.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, CPU staff should include the specific language for verbal directions to patrons for unloading trays. These directions may be different at each location depending on the particular needs of the screening station but should be consistent at each station.

Recommendations 5, 6, and 7 can be completed by updating the screening procedures to comport with best practice by identifying the elements of the screening process essential to the

efficiency of screening line throughput, breaking down the screening requirements into clear, actionable steps that are consistent in the procedures and other guidance documents, and providing the specific verbal directions to be given patrons to complete the steps, including unloading trays.

Recommendation 8

PROGRESS

The Sheriff's Office should consult with an expert in communications and usability to develop instructional signs that use graphics and post these signs in locations where people are best able to see and act on their instructions.

STATUS UPDATE: In December 2022, Sheriff's Office staff shared examples of updated signage at screening locations, but noted they depend on FMD to create signage. As a result, we noted that we would include FMD in the next follow up. FMD staff explained that new signage is created as part of a capital project, and that additional research would be needed to identify a pathway for developing improved screening signage. FMD staff indicated that they will identify steps for this process over the next year and work with the CPU in doing so.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, FMD and CPU staff should identify a plan to design and produce appropriate graphically based directional signage for screening.

Justin Anderson conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor's Office at KCAO@KingCounty.gov or 206-477-1033.