



The CCJ/COSCA Family Justice Initiative

Supported by the State Justice Institute

King County, Washington FJI Pilot Site Overview



Court Structure

In King County (Seattle) Washington (2.23 million population), Domestic Relations cases are heard in Superior Court. When children are involved, the cases are heard in the Family Court; divorces without children are heard by other judges. There were 8,682 Domestic Relations petitions filed per year in 2017.

Staffing Capacity

The King County Superior Court has more than 50 judges, and there are 7 judges and a Chief of the Family Division. There are also five commissioners who hear family cases. Most judges rotate every two years; however, Judges can choose to stay with the Unified Family Court longer. Commissioners are hired to the division, often stay for several years, and many come to the position with long-term experience in domestic relations.

Current & Future Triage Practices

King County has existing pathways for uncontested cases. There is a 90-day minimum waiting period for divorces in Washington. King County has existing

pathways for uncontested cases. There is a 90-day minimum waiting period for divorces in Washington. When parties are in agreement from the beginning, they can schedule for their 91st day on the Final Decree Calendar. Any time after the initial filing, parties can schedule a final hearing in ex parte with 14 days notice.

There is also a Simple Divorce Program for self-represented parties who agree on all issues and do not have children or significant assets. In these situations, ERCMs can present agreed upon orders without the parties needing to appear.

King County

Quick Facts



**212 DAYS
TIME TO
RESOLUTION**



**3.7%
DOMESTIC
TRIAL RATE**



**48% OF CASES
WITH CHILDREN**

Data taken from the FJI Landscape of Domestic Relations Cases in State Courts (2018).

King County, WA Family Justice Initiative Overview

Court Services and Self-Help Center

King County's Family Law Information Center is staffed by Family Law Facilitators who are paralegals and are available on a walk-in or appointment basis. Online self-help is available locally and statewide that principally focuses on court forms. The King County Superior Court website also provides forms and instructions in PDF versions.

King County also has four full-time Early Resolution Case Managers, attorneys who provide assistance to parties to facilitate faster resolution of cases. The ERCMs usually connect with pro se litigants who need assistance moving their case forward at the status/non-compliance calendar that occurs 140 days after filing.

Family Court Services is staffed with 10.75 master level professionals who conduct court ordered evaluations, draft parenting plans, and facilitate parenting mediation among other responsibilities.

Mediation is required by statute for all cases, and King County has several options for mediation both within the court in the in the community. Family Court Services employees facilitate parenting classes which are mandatory for all parties with children, and Early Resolution Case Managers facilitate an orientation to family law which is required for all self-represented parties.



Data Capacity

The Clerk's office oversees the court's case management system and provides analysis and reports. Specifically, judges receive quarterly reports and their caseload and the Chief gets a list of all cases and an average age. There are current and emerging technological innovations for parties. The Clerk's office has a customer service email and e-filing. They are moving towards online scheduling. The state is piloting some forms to be fillable online.

