



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

Law Enforcement Audit Program: 2022 Biennial Report

ADVANCING LAW ENFORCEMENT PERFORMANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND EQUITY

The King County Auditor's Office performs independent oversight of county departments and offices for King County residents and policy-makers, improving the equity, efficiency, and effectiveness of county services through impactful audit recommendations. The King County Council established the Law Enforcement Audit Program within the Auditor's Office in 2006 to specifically focus on oversight of the County's criminal legal system. This biennial report addresses the Program's work over the last two years.

High impact oversight

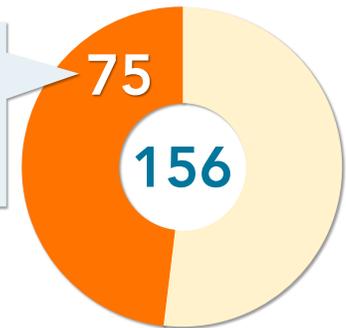
We have authority to provide oversight of all county functions whose missions relate to the criminal legal system. Between 2020 and 2022, we:

- **published six audits** featuring operations in the King County Sheriff's Office, the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, King County Superior Court, and the Department of Judicial Administration
- **followed up on recommendations from nine audits**, presenting updates on implementation in public reports
- **won one highly-competitive national Knighton Award** for performance audits (see page 3)

Data shortcomings inhibit progress

Our audits of departments and agencies that are part of the criminal legal system in King County frequently identify limitations in data quality and completeness that form barriers to systemic change.

Nearly half of criminal legal audit recommendations since 2011 address data shortcomings.



Key results

Implementation of our recommendations between June 2020 and June 2022 contributed to:



Better race data to help the Prosecuting Attorney's Office make equity-informed decisions



Improved ability of Public Defense to respond to workload demands and track progress toward goals



A handout to help sex offense victims understand the resources available to them



More efficient pay administration and shift management in the Sheriff's Office



Addition of an inventory manager to Sheriff's Office staff, who works to identify and secure high-risk assets from loss and unauthorized use

Addressing systemic disparities requires improved data

Between 2020 and 2022, our office completed five audits of criminal legal system functions that included recommendations to improve data. Many of the recommendations in these audits flowed from findings identifying racial disparities in how King County agencies police communities, house and discipline incarcerated people, and support sex offense victims and individuals needing civil protection orders in navigating the legal system. Taken together, the findings are indicative of a systemic issue in criminal legal data collection, access, and transparency in King County.

Audit recommendations relating to data and disparities included:

- **Protection Orders** – Improve tracking of civil protection order outcomes and barriers.
- **Sex Assault Investigations** – Collect and track demographic data about defendants and victims, use data to assess outcomes, and develop plans to address disparities.
- **Jail Safety** – Publicly report safety goals and data on violent incidents and uses of force, broken out by population demographics; document reviews of infractions and sanctions data by race to detect racial disparities and take steps to reduce any disparities.
- **Calls for Service** – Ensure data systems can capture race data and implement a policy for collection of this data; establish process for analyzing race data to identify and address racial disparities.
- **Traffic Stops** – Collect perceived demographic data for each traffic stop and analyze data to identify and address disparities.

Without complete criminal legal data, if disparities are observed in one portion of the system, it is difficult and time-consuming to trace both the upstream contributors to these disparities and the downstream effects that these disparities have on individuals as they move through the system. Implementing these recommendations would positively impact criminal legal system operations and oversight.

To further address disparities, Council may wish to take steps to increase data transparency and access

The amount of work required to develop systems of complete and accurate data—where records of individuals can be connected across elements of the criminal legal system and data can be easily accessed and analyzed by policy-makers and oversight offices—is significant. The County has taken steps to achieve this in the past. For instance, between 1997 and 2002, agencies from across the County criminal legal system participated in a law, safety, and justice strategic integration process that aimed to make criminal legal information available to decision-makers and law enforcement officers. A strategic plan published in 2002 noted the numerous problems created by lack of information sharing across agencies and noted “the county can improve the management of criminal cases, reduce costs associated with those cases, and improve public safety, by sharing and integrating the information within the disparate computer systems of the county.” Goals from those efforts, however, were not fully achieved.

New efforts are underway in the executive branch to support collection of high quality data that can be stored centrally and more easily accessed by both decision-makers and those providing essential oversight to the criminal legal system. Without this access, it will be difficult for King County to identify and address the causes of the systemic racial inequities that exist in its criminal legal system.

Matter for Council Consideration

To address disparities, Council may wish to consider whether legislation or other Council action would help increase cross-branch data transparency and access.

83%
CONCURRENCE

Concurrence increases impact

Concurrence with our recommendations is the first step in positive change for the County. Between June 2019 and June 2022, we made 76 recommendations to law enforcement functions. Agencies concurred with 63 of these recommendations; the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention did not concur with three related to jail safety, and Superior Court did not respond to all 10 recommendations in the Protection Orders audit.

79%
ADVANCED

Advancement toward implementation

Following up on our recommendations advances positive change by providing transparency and increasing accountability. We track recommendations until they are complete, reviewing 73 audit recommendations over the last two years. Overall, agencies advanced 79 percent of the recommendations we followed up on toward implementation this biennium.



43%
PROGRESS

Limited progress on older recommendations to Sheriff’s Office

Fewer than half of recommendations made to the Sheriff’s Office prior to 2018 have made progress in the past two years.¹ Of the 28 recommendations remaining from these audits, just 12 advanced in status. Two recommendations from the 2017 Early Intervention System audit regressed to “open” and none of its nine recommendations are complete. Further, 58 percent of the incomplete recommendations from these audits directly relate to data management. The Sheriff’s Office has gone through a transition in leadership during this biennium and has also faced staffing challenges. Further, implementation of some recommendations may be impacted by collective bargaining, an issue we addressed in our [2020 biennial report](#).

Award-winning oversight

Each year, local government audit organizations from around the US and Canada submit their best performance audit reports to be judged by their peers. Our office won an award in 2020 for an audit within about Law Enforcement Audit Program.

2020 Knighton Award Winner: Sex Assault Investigations and Outcomes

In this audit, we identified ways that various county actors could respond more effectively to sex offenses and ensure that victims are being connected with important resources and support in a timely manner. The report has been praised by sexual assault victim advocacy leaders and has helped inform Washington state efforts to bring similar transparency and accountability to law enforcement agencies, prosecuting attorneys, and the courts across the state. We also provided input to help inform a similar case review effort by the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission.

¹ [Performance audit of King County Sheriff’s Office and Office of Law Enforcement Oversight \(2012\)](#)
[Law Enforcement Oversight: Limited independence, authority, and access to information impede effectiveness \(2015\)](#)
[Early Intervention System: Better use could improve accountability \(2017\)](#)
[King County Sheriff’s Office Overtime: Better strategy could reduce hidden costs and safety risks \(2017\)](#)

Publications

Between June 2020 and June 2022, our office completed six audits related to criminal justice functions in King County. We also followed up on recommendations from multiple audits. All publications are available on the [King County Auditor’s website](#).

Performance audit reports

- *Sex Offense Cases: Some Victims and Their Cases May be Harmed by Gaps*
- *Courthouse Security Screening: Following Screening Procedures, Opportunities for Greater Efficiency*
- *Adult Jails Need Risk-Based Approach to Improve Safety, Equity*
- *Protection Orders: User-Focused Approach Could Help Address Barriers*
- *Sheriff’s Office Data Shows Racial Disparities, Potential to Expand Alternative Policing*
- *Traffic Enforcement: Strategies Needed to Achieve Safety Goals*

Other products and presentations

- [Sheriff’s Office Systemic Issues web page](#)
- Sheriff’s Office Computer-Aided Dispatch data dashboard
- Presentation of the Sex Offense Investigations and Outcomes audit to the Washington State Sexual Assault Coordinated Community Response Task Force
- Presentation of the Protection Orders audit to the Domestic Violence Initiative Regional Task Force

Work in progress

- Alternatives to Incarceration

Follow-up reports

- Sex Offense Investigations and Outcomes
- Early Intervention Systems
- ICE Access to Private Data
- Law Enforcement Oversight (2012)
- Law Enforcement Oversight (2015)
- Noise Code
- Public Defense Management
- Sheriff’s Office High Risk Equipment
- Sheriff’s Office Overtime

Strategic direction team

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Law Enforcement Audit Lead

Grant Dailey

Auditor

Anu Sidhu

Auditor

Every member of the Auditor’s Office staff made contributions to our criminal legal oversight between June 2020 and June 2022.