



Washington

Time Zone: PST
Capital: Olympia, Thurston County
of Counties: 39
State Web: <http://access.wa.gov>
Court Web: www.courts.wa.gov

Administration

Court Administrator, Temple of Justice, PO Box 41174, Olympia, WA, 98504; 360-753-3365, Fax: 360-586-8869.

The Supreme and Appellate Courts

The Supreme Court is the state's court of last resort. Most cases come from the state Court of Appeals, though certain cases can be appealed directly from Superior Court. Supreme and Appellate opinions are at www.courts.wa.gov/appellate_trial_courts.

The Washington Courts

Court	Type	How Organized	Jurisdiction Highpoints
Superior*	General	39 Courts in 30 Districts	Felony, Civil, Domestic, Eviction, Estate, Probate, Juvenile
District*	Limited	49 Courts in 39 Counties	Misdemeanor, Civil Actions \$100,000* or less, Eviction, Small Claims (\$5,000), Traffic, Ordinance
Municipal*	Limited	226+ Courts	Misdemeanor (City law), Traffic, Ordinance

* = profiled in PRRS

Details on the Court Structure

Superior Court is the court of general jurisdiction, and has exclusive jurisdiction for felony matters, real property rights, domestic relations, estate, mental illness, juvenile, and civil cases over \$100,000 (This limit was increased from \$75,000 on July 24, 2015.) The Superior Courts also hear appeals from courts of limited jurisdiction.

District Courts have concurrent jurisdiction with superior courts over misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor violations, and civil cases under \$100,000 (This limit was increased from \$75,000 on July 24, 2015.) District Courts have exclusive jurisdiction over small claims and infractions. The maximum penalty for gross misdemeanors is one year in jail and a \$5,000 fine. The maximum penalty for misdemeanors is 90 days in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

Violations of municipal or city ordinances are heard in **Municipal Courts**. A municipal court's authority over these ordinance violations is similar to the authority that district courts have over state law violations. The ordinance violation must have occurred within the boundaries of the municipality. Like district courts, municipal courts only have jurisdiction over gross misdemeanors, misdemeanors and infractions. Municipal courts do not accept civil or small claims cases. **Many Municipal Courts combine their record keeping with a District Court and are housed in that District Court Location.**

Per state law, eviction cases may be heard in either the Superior or District Court.

In addition to a municipal court, cities can establish traffic violation bureaus or **TVBs**. TVBs handle traffic violations of municipal ordinances that involve no possible incarceration.

Record Searching Facts You Need to Know

Fees and Record Searching Tips

State law mandates the filing, copy, and certification fees for Superior and District Courts. In the Superior Court, the fee for an uncertified copy is \$.50 and \$.25 for an electronic computer printout; for a certified copy the fee is \$5.00 for the first page and \$1.00 for each additional page. District Courts often charge \$5.00 for certification of a document plus any copy fees. Although

**Online Access is
Statewide**

36.18.016(11) states the fee is \$30.00 an hour, search fees vary by court and can be anywhere from \$20 to \$40 per hour.

District Courts retain civil records for ten years from date of final disposition and then records are destroyed. District Courts retain criminal records forever.

An SASE is required in most courts that respond to written search requests.

The state is currently in a very large transition regarding certain online access.

For many years all Superior and District Courts have participated on the **JIS-Link** online system for fee-based public access. JIS Link has three applications:

1. **ACORDS** (Appellate Court Record and Data System)
2. **DISCIS** (the District and Municipal Court Information System – with no Civil Judgment index.)
3. **SCOMIS** (the Superior Court Case Management System)

Consider the following.

- In 2015, the State Court Administration began implementation of a new case management software system called Odyssey, purchased Tyler Technologies.
- As part of Odyssey, a new online Public Access Portal was created - but only for Superior Court cases and not for District Court cases. At the end of 2017, 24 county Superior Courts were active on Odyssey with 12 more counties to be added in June 2018 and one county in November 2018. However, King and Pierce counties are not planning to connect to the Record Access Portal of Odyssey.
- JIS-Link will continue to operate in the same courts and will NOT be phased out by Odyssey. However, King County District Courts are no longer uploading case details into the DISCIS portion of JIS. See the **King County Issues** below.
- There are also two lesser systems - **DW Search Engine** with limited information available and **ClerkePass, a vendor offering** with search and document retrieval capabilities in a limited number of counties.
- This Odyssey system free public access system will replace the free search lesser public system DW Search Engine - and NOT JIS-Link.

About JIS-Link

For **detailed case docket data**, the AOC provides a Judicial Information System's subscription service called **JIS-Link** which provides access to all counties and court levels. One may search a single county or statewide for criminal searches; however, searching for civil records is by single county only. Civil cases include small claims, domestic violence, vehicle impounds, name changes, anti-harassment petitions, and lien foreclosures vehicle impounds, and property damages.

The JIS subscription includes access to **SCOMIS** (the Superior Court case management system) and **ACORDS** (appellate courts data). SCOMIS enables the superior court to record parties and legal instruments filed in superior court cases, to set cases on court calendars, and to enter case judgments and final dispositions. When a SCOMIS case number is found in the JIS application, detail level of the case may need to be viewed within the appropriate SCOMIS court display.

In general, the throughput date for JIS is from 1994 or 1995 forward, but there are cases back to 1979 for SCOMIS. The subscription fees include a one-time \$100.00 per site, a transaction fee of \$.065. There is a \$6.00 per month minimum charge. Visit www.courts.wa.gov/jislink or call 360-753-3365.

Note there is also a **limited, free look-up of docket information** is at <https://dw.courts.wa.gov/> (see below).

More About Odyssey and its Record Access Portal

As mentioned, the AOC is in the midst of replacing its case management system (SCOMIS) at the Superior Court with software called Odyssey supplied by Tyler technologies. Thus, Odyssey public access to court case information is ONLY for the Superior Courts and NOT for the District Courts.

The Odyssey system will also provide a two-tiered portal access system to case information. An **unregistered public user** may access the Odyssey Portal online at <https://odysseyportal.courts.wa.gov/odyportal>. This access will not require any credentials and will provide information similar to what is available free to public users on the Washington Courts DW Search Engine (see below). Case documents are not available.

Note that public users will have access to more case information, as well as publicly available documents, onsite at the Clerk's Office lobby terminal. **So, the Odyssey free system is not considered to be online/onsite equivalent.** This site will eventually replace the site at <http://dw.courts.wa.gov> (see below)

Per several record retrieval firms, the State of Washington has acknowledged that the Odyssey system is flawed and can be unreliable. Until all the bugs are worked out, Odyssey is best used a way to perform searches based on a case number, and not by name.

Registered users may access public court records and documents, but all document access fees must be paid directly to the County Clerk. At present, if a user wants to register in multiple counties, a unique email address is needed for each county. For questions regarding Odyssey, email OdysseyPortal@courts.wa.gov.

The King County Issue

The King County District Court (with 10 locations) is the largest court of limited jurisdiction in the state of Washington and is currently responsible for processing approximately a quarter of a million matters per year. As mentioned, King County will not move onto the Odyssey system. In late 2017, the District Court(s) in King County began using a new case management program called the **KCDC e-Filing Portal**. Phase 1 of this switch involved cases initiated with a civil summons and complaint, for filings of a foreign judgment, for filings of a money judgment from a District or Municipal court, for petitions to challenge a drug-based property forfeiture, and petitions for return of animals.

In the 3rd Quarter 2018 the KCDC Case Management System will pull in Criminal and Infractions as well as Civil Phase II (which includes small claims, civil protection orders, vehicle impounds and name changes). At this time, it is assumed that the District Court will implement the same search procedures currently in place and not update the JIS-Link system with criminal record data.

Note: The manner in which the new King County District Court Case Management System is organized has unfortunately created a very negative impact on record searching. Per feedback from locals, researchers have lost the ability to filter by date, case type, party type, or even pull a judgment index. There are no identifiers. A name search generates a splat of cases that are not in chronological order and each listing must be researched and few details are provided. One must stand in line at the clerk's office to obtain detailed case information or to secure document copies. The county did add certain standard access abilities prevalent in JIS (and typically found in other states' systems), but these perks are restricted to use only by attorneys and case participants.

About the DW Search Engine

A **limited, free look-up of docket information** is at <http://dw.courts.wa.gov/>. Search Municipal and District cases or Superior cases or Appellate cases by name or case number or court date. The purpose of this site is to point where the official or complete court record is housed. As such, the outcome is not shown, but a link to a summary of the judgment does appear. No identifiers are shown. The search is by Municipal and District cases or by Superior cases or by Appellate cases.

But when searching for cases in Asotin, Clallam, Columbia, Cowlitz, Franklin, Garfield, Grays Harbor, Island, Jefferson, Kitsap, Klickitat, Lewis, Mason, Pacific, San Juan, Skagit, Skamania, Snohomish, Thurston, Wahkiakum, Whatcom, Whitman and Yakima Superior Courts, one must use Odyssey.

About the ClerkePass Documents Online

At present at least 15 Superior Courts are connecting with a third-party service offered by www.Clerkepass.com to view or obtain certified documents and non-certified documents. There is no name searching. A User can view and request Certified as well as Non-Certified documents. A "View" can only view Certified documents ordered by other users but cannot request any documents. A "Guest User" is a User who can request documents without registering with ClerkePass.com. The web page states it will charge a CAF (customized access fee) plus the existing court fees. The fees are detailed at the individual court URLs for this site.