



# KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

DECEMBER 1, 2022




## Follow-up on Courthouse Security Screening Audit

**The Sheriff's Office's Courthouse Protection Unit made progress on addressing most of the audit recommendations despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, clarifying procedures and improving employee safety.** This audit, issued in August 2020, made eight recommendations focused on courthouse security screening. Despite the significant and ongoing changes in the visitors and activities at King County's courthouse locations, the Court Protection Unit (CPU) took steps to address the audit's recommendations—primarily with updates to its standard operating procedures (SOPs). It also reviewed screener equipment needs at its outlying District Court locations and requested updated instructional signage from the Facilities Management Division (FMD). These actions helped clarify screening processes, completing one recommendation and making progress on three more (of the eight recommendations). Finishing updates to CPU SOPs and guidance could complete those three in the near term.

**Superior Court, Sheriff's Office, and FMD improved communication and collaboration, nearly completing two more recommendations.** During the audit, coordination between the CPU and FMD's Security Unit was strained, but was reportedly improving. That collaboration has continued since the time of the audit. CPU's updated SOPs reference FMD's facility security and support roles, and Superior Court, CPU, and FMD Security staff meet monthly to coordinate on security needs. As a result, two additional progress recommendations can be completed over the next year by together reviewing the security audit requirements of Court General Rule 36 (GR36) and updating policies with any resulting changes.

**Two barriers will require focused effort by the Sheriff's Office to ensure security screening reliability and efficiency.** Random testing of screening effectiveness is a best practice, but CPU staff stated that they could not test due to concerns with the terms of the screener labor agreement. This recommendation remains open. In addition, although they made progress simplifying and consolidating previous signage, CPU leaders were unsure how to fully implement improved screening signage as signage design is FMD's area of expertise. Completing these two recommendations will take consistent effort to engage stakeholders in identifying potential solutions.

Of the eight audit recommendations:

	1 DONE		6 PROGRESS		1 OPEN
<b>Fully implemented</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.		<b>Partially implemented</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.		<b>Remain unresolved</b> 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: CPU staff check the screening equipment functionality daily, and the updated SOPs include these checks. The SOPs also provide that lead security screeners will "conduct periodic test exercises to evaluate Security Screeners." However, CPU does not have a randomized weapons testing program. Sheriff's Office leadership explained that screeners have not agreed to a randomized testing program and have indicated that screeners would grieve such a program as a violation of contract. Given this is the first audit follow-up, evaluation in future follow-ups will address this barrier in greater detail.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, CPU should implement a randomized testing program. Randomized testing of screening effectiveness is best practice, as it helps ensure that staff training and operational procedures accurately identify and prevent weapons from entering secure facilities as intended.

## 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: During the audit, we heard examples from CPU and FMD Security staff where expectations of the others' roles and operational responsibilities were not met. We identified areas in each group's SOPs where coordination with the other was unclear. During follow-up, Sheriff's Office and FMD staff reported that coordination is significantly improved; CPU and FMD Security staff now meet biweekly to discuss needs and coordinate operations. In addition, updated (May 2022) CPU SOPs provide specific direction to CPU staff in coordinating with FMD Security, and FMD also plans to update its procedures to reference CPU roles in 2023.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the CPU and FMD Security should continue their biweekly coordination meetings, and FMD should complete updates to SOPs.

## 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: Sheriff's Office CPU staff actively participate in monthly Superior Court meetings addressing security concerns and coordinating security needs. Superior Court staff noted that the content of these meetings continuously addresses the requirements of GR36, and the Court Security Plan references the relevant CPU and FMD SOPs relevant to each of the GR36 requirements. In addition, both FMD and CPU staff shared examples of their participation with the Court Security Committee. Superior Court staff explained that the remaining requirement, per GR36(g)(3), to perform "security audits" at least every three years, is on the agenda for the upcoming monthly meeting.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, Superior Court, Sheriff's Office, and FMD staff should continue their participation in the monthly stakeholder meetings and collectively address the "security audit" requirement, including any following updates to SOPs or other plans referenced in the Court Security Plan.

## Recommendation 4

DONE



**The Sheriff's Office Court Protection Unit should identify, document, and distribute the equipment needed for screening operations for each weapons screening location.**

STATUS UPDATE: As part of the audit, we noted that outlying District Court locations seemingly lacked minor but important equipment, such as chairs and needlestick-resistant gloves. CPU's updated SOPs identify the equipment needed to perform screening functions in District Court locations, generally, but are not specific to each location. However, Sheriff's Office staff explained that previous challenges to get these types of items were caused by difficulty in getting approvals through the budget authorization process—an issue we discussed in our 2019 [Sheriff's Office high-risk equipment audit](#). The captain responsible for CPU now has direct spending authorization for these types of items, and Sheriff's Office staff described specific examples of coordinating purchases, addressing the personal protective equipment and station needs observed during the audit.

IMPACT: Most King County courthouse locations have fundamental design challenges, making implementation of screening difficult. As a result, regional District Court locations do not have x-ray scanning machines. Instead, searches are done by hand. By identifying and purchasing equipment to support screeners in these locations, such as non-stick gloves and over height chairs, CPU helps increase both safety and productivity for security screeners in these locations—in turn increasing security for building visitors.

## Recommendation 5

PROGRESS



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

STATUS UPDATE: CPU's updated SOPs now include guidance to screeners that address efficiency through improved descriptions of processes and communication with persons going through screening. However, the word efficiency is not included as a goal, and the process descriptions do not address how they relate to efficiency. In discussion with Sheriff's Office staff, it noted that it

only partial concurred with this recommendation. reviewing the effectiveness of the procedures may present ways to reference their intended efficiency while keeping weapons detection as the essential criteria.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, the Sheriff's Office should reference efficiency relative to the screening processes and procedures in its SOPs. For example, as explained in Recommendation 6, below, the SOPs specify that people should be passed to secondary screening, which is inherently an efficiency-driven practice. Language stating that following these kinds of procedures will help ensure efficient progress of screening lines could address the recommendation.

## 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: The updated CPU SOPs explain that people who trigger the magnetometer (and thus need additional screening) "will be clearly directed to the hand-wand station," and the screener training manual similarly directs screeners to "send the customer to secondary screening." These improvements address the intent of not delaying individuals at the magnetometer as a "choke point" in screening line efficiency. However, the screener training manual also directs staff to send individuals through the magnetometer after removing their belts; while the SOPs provide "if a belt is suspected of setting off the magnetometer the person shall not be asked to remove it and go back through the magnetometer." Although seemingly minor, this inconsistency points to the need for specific, consistent direction regarding the hand off from the magnetometer to secondary (hand-wand) screening.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, CPU staff should revisit procedures and break them down into clear, actionable steps that precisely address each process step, ensuring their consistency across the SOPs, training manual, and new hire training checklist. Ideally, this can be addressed alongside Recommendation 7, below. The current SOPs and training manuals logically focus on the operation of the three main types of detection equipment: x-ray, magnetometer, and hand-wands. But for courthouse patrons, screening is a process: placing items on the x-ray, walking through the magnetometer, and then being sent to secondary screening if the magnetometer alarms. Fully documenting clear, specific, and consistent directions for screeners to provide to customers—like the guidance to "remove all items from your pockets"—alongside the existing equipment instructions could quickly address these gaps.

## 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: The updated SOPs specifically include direction that "screeners will verbally direct people to the proper area to retrieve their property" and that "people requiring further

screening will be clearly directed to the hand-wand station.” Although these updates demonstrate an intent to implement the recommendation, best practice is to have specific language that instructs patrons on exactly what is expected to avoid confusion and congestion; for example, “please take your tray to the back table, remove your items, and stack your tray to the right.” During the audit, we observed that after only being told to “take trays to the back,” some patrons would return to the x-ray with their empty tray; alternately, after only being told to “leave your empty tray,” some patrons would empty and leave their tray at the x-ray. As noted above, specific language is included in other elements of the SOPs—for example, the direction “security screeners will tell people to ‘remove all items from your pockets.’” Completing this recommendation requires the same directive approach.

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. Ideally, this can be addressed as part Recommendation 6, above.

## 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: Sheriff’s Office staff shared examples of new signage introduced at screening locations since the audit. The signage consolidates and simplifies screening directions for patrons and is placed logically to provide people sufficient time to prepare for screening. However, the signage is still entirely text-based, in English. Sheriff’s Office staff explained that they do not have expertise on graphic design elements, and instead rely on the FMD of the Department of Executive Services to assist them in creating signage. Given the examples provided in the audit, both CPU and FMD will be included in the next follow-up.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, CPU should develop instructional signage that include graphics for screening directions. If FMD does not have the technical capability to design appropriate signage, it should develop an alternative plan for doing so.

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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](mailto:KCAO@KingCounty.gov) or 206-477-1033.