



Court Date Notification

2.5.13

What is Court Date Notification? A court date notification system reminds an individual with a pending court appearance shortly before the hearing of the location, date, and time that the person must appear in court. The goal of the program is to reduce the number of hearings where the individual "fails to appear" (FTA). The most successful systems use live callers, though automated calls are an alternative. The possible reasons someone fails to appear include: 1) The long period of time between when the hearing is first scheduled and when it occurs; 2) The person doesn't understand the importance of appear; and 3) The person simply forgot due to instability in their lives.

What are Spokane City and County Doing Now? Individuals receive written or oral notice of hearings, but neither the City nor County has a court date notification system to remind individuals of upcoming hearings.

What are Other City and Counties Doing? Jefferson County, Colorado tested and implemented a Court Date Notification Program that successfully reduced the FTAs by 52%. The cost involved assigning 1-2 individuals to make the live calls one week before the set hearing. The program was started because of jail overcrowding and the realization that three-quarters of the people in jail for non-compliance (33% of all jail inmates) were there for FTA. Jefferson County recognized that the financial drain caused by the FTAs on the resources of the judge, clerk, law enforcement, attorneys, and jail staff was not sustainable. Jefferson County noticed collateral benefits in addition to the reduction in FTAs. For example, the Sheriff's customer service evaluations improved and the callers were able to field questions about driving and bus directions and other court information.

The Jefferson County program was modeled after programs in Multnomah County, Oregon, King County, and Seattle Municipal Courts. Programs that used automated calls reported reductions in FTAs of 37 - 38%.

How Can Spokane City and County Improve? Spokane has significant numbers of FTAs. In 2008, 23% of defendants failed to appear in District Court and 32% of defendants failed to appear in Superior Court. Sixty-five percent of those who failed to appear in District Court did so more than one time. Eighty-percent of those who failed to appear in Superior Court did so more than one time. Instituting a live caller court date notification system could significantly reduce these FTAs. Instituting automated reminder calls could also reduce the number of FTAs, although not as dramatically. Spokane County consultant, David Bennett, has recommended the County include a court date notification system as part of a full service pre-trial services

program. County Consultant Dr. David Thompson noted that "[a]ny programs that can resolve the offense without creating an opportunity for FTA, or that may increase the appearance rate, would significantly reduce [the] burden on the Spokane County Legal-Justice System." Thompson, p. 13.

How will Spokane City and County Benefit by Implementing these Changes?

- Cost Savings: Failures to appear are very costly to the system. David Bennett reported that there is an estimated system cost of \$1,346 for each individual returned to jail on a FTA warrant. Court time is wasted, a warrant must be issued and processed, law enforcement must arrest and book the individual, another jail bed is occupied at \$120/day and another court hearing must be held.
- Safer Communities: Jail beds are reserved for offenders that place the community at risk.
- Avoid the Disruption Caused by Jail to Employment, School, Housing, Medical Care, and Family Responsibilities: When people are in jail, jobs are lost, bills go unpaid, financial aid for school is terminated, evictions are served, and children and spouses lose a vital member of the family unit. These are counter-productive, often irreversible disruptions in an offender's life. Moreover, the FTA on the person's record may mean it is less likely the person will be released from custody in the future.

Sources of Information:

Timothy R. Schnacke, Michael R. Jones, Dorian M. Wilderman, "Increasing Court Appearance Rates and Other Benefits of Live-Caller Telephone Court Date Reminders: the Jefferson County, Colorado, FTA Pilot Project and Court Date Notification Program," May 18, 2011, <http://pretrial.org/Success/Jefferson%20County%20CO%20Increasing%20Court%20Appearance%20Rates%202011.pdf>.

David Bennett and Donna Lattin, "Spokane County Corrections Needs Assessment Master Plan Draft," February 14, 2008, Chap. 1, pp. 39-40; 66-67; Chap. 4, p.3, 14; [http://www.spokanecounty.org/data/countysheriff/jep/Needs%20Assessment%20\(5Mb\).pdf](http://www.spokanecounty.org/data/countysheriff/jep/Needs%20Assessment%20(5Mb).pdf)

David R. Thompson, Ph.D., "Results from the Discovery Analysis and Resolution (DAR) Process, A Compilation of Ideas Collected and Derived From Discussions with Spokane County Elected Officials and Professional Staff, Focused on Spokane County's Legal-Justice System, Version: 5 October 2009," prepared for Spokane County Board of County Commissioners, p. 13.

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