



TRIBAL BUSINESS HIGHLIGHTS

Written by Crystal Bass, Tribal Administrative Director in partnership with relevant departments and programs.

INTRODUCTION TO JUSTICE SERVICES LEADERSHIP



Tamara Saluskin,
Justice Services Deputy
Director

Since March 2011, Tamara has served as the Deputy Director of the Yakama Nation Justice Services Department (JSDD), bringing over two decades of dedicated service and leadership to her community. A proud Yakama tribal member, Tamara's career reflects a deep commitment to justice, youth advocacy, and tribal sovereignty.

Tamara holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Washington State University and a master's degree in social work from the University of Washington. Her professional career began in Probation Services and quickly expanded to include judicial and advocacy roles. She was appointed Juvenile Judge by the Tribal Council in 2000 and 2010 and served as a Lay Advocate in the Public Defender's Office.

Her experience extends beyond tribal programs. Tamara worked with the Washington State Division of Children and Family Services (now DCYF) for five years, where she earned the Toppenish "Employee Office Award" and the Region 2 "Outstanding Diversity Award" in 2002. She also contributed to national efforts in child welfare during her time at the National Indian Child Welfare Agency (NICWA) in Portland, Oregon.

As Deputy Director, Tamara oversees six key programs: Justice Services Administration, Tribal Courts, Prosecutor's Office, Public Defender's Office, Probation Services, Youth Court Services, and the CASA Program. Her role includes providing administrative

support to the judiciary and ensuring ethical communication practices in ongoing cases.

Justice Services Highlights

The Justice Services Department (JSDD) plays a vital role in upholding the Yakama Nation's sovereignty by ensuring the interpretation and enforcement of tribal laws through a robust court system. As legal complexities and caseloads increase—particularly following the Retrocession of State Public Law 280—the department remains focused on **capacity building** to meet these evolving demands.

In 2018, JSDD completed a **Comprehensive Justice System Strategic Plan** identifying seven priority areas:

1. Law Enforcement Capacity
2. Court Capacity
3. Domestic Violence
4. Substance Abuse/Misuse
5. Child Abuse & Neglect
6. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) & Traditional Practices
7. Juvenile Justice

INFRASTRUCTURE & FACILITIES

- **2019:** Secured a **\$1M grant** for construction of a new Court Facility.
- **2023:** Completed construction of the **Multi-Purpose Justice Center**, now home to Tribal Courts, Justice Services Programs, and Public Safety.

JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP

- **2022:** Appointment of **Chief Judge Ronna Washines**, a Yakama tribal member and licensed attorney. Under her leadership:
 - A Juvenile Judge, three full-time Associate Judges, and three on-call Judges were appointed.

- The judiciary now includes **three Juris Doctorates**, all with active Washington State Bar Licenses, exceeding the minimum qualifications set by the Revised Yakama Codes.

PROGRAM & GRANTS DEVELOPMENT

- **2023:** Awarded a **\$900,000 five-year grant** to hire a full-time Clerk and Associate Judge, and support relocation and furnishing of new offices.
- **2024:** Secured **\$90,000 in one-time funding** from the BIA Office of Justice Services to upgrade the electronic case management system.

2024: Applied for two additional **\$900,000 five-year grants**. The first will be used to implement **anew court case management system** and hire a **Probation Specialist**. The second will establish a Drug Court in partnership with the Tribal Health Officer. Award notifications are expected this fall.

These strategic initiatives reflect the department’s unwavering commitment to strengthening the tribal justice infrastructure and ensuring the Yakama Nation’s legal system remains resilient, responsive, and rooted in sovereignty.



Court Hearings Data
FY 2024 (10/1/23 through 9/30/24)

| APPELLATE HEARINGS SCHEDULED | |
|--|-------|
| INITIAL HEARING ON ERRORS OF LAW | 18 |
| TOTAL | 18 |
| CHILDREN’S COURT HEARINGS SCHEDULED | |
| DELINQUENCY | 333 |
| DEPENDENCY | 928 |
| TRUANCY | 6 |
| TOTAL | 1267 |
| CRIMINAL HEARINGS SCHEDULED | |
| ARRAIGNMENTS | 635 |
| BAIL HEARINGS | 512 |
| PRE-TRIALS | 1136 |
| BENCH TRIALS | 137 |
| MISCELLANEOUS (Review, Sentencing, Show Cause, Deferred Prosecution, Restitution, Plea Agreement, Extradition) | 128 |
| TOTAL | 2,548 |
| CIVIL HEARINGS SCHEDULED | |
| ADOPTION | 1 |
| CIVIL COMPLAINT (TORT) | 201 |
| CUSTODY | 171 |
| DIVORCE | 53 |
| GUARDIANSHIP | 427 |
| NAME CHANGE | 21 |
| PATERNITY | 151 |
| PROBATE | 167 |
| PROTECTION ORDER | 11 |
| RESTRAINING ORDER | 104 |
| TRAFFIC | 12 |
| TOTAL | 1,319 |

FINANCIAL SPOTLIGHT

AUDITS

The Fiscal Year 2022 audit is completed and awaiting final review. The final report will be filed with the Federal Clearinghouse soon.

The FY 2023 Single Audit will commence immediately following the FY 2022 rollover.

While we are working collaboratively to move the process forward, there is a high level of reliance on the work to be performed by our external auditors, along with coordination across multiple components of the audit process.

TWO PERCENT FUNDING

Awards were issued for 2% funds for fifteen tribal programs, totaling \$248,820. The awards will help to fund unmet needs for equipment, positions, and services.

CONGRESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT

CONGRESSIONAL DIRECT SPENDING

CDS allow members of Congress to request specific federal funding for local projects in their states or districts. These requests are

included in annual appropriations bills and are subject to strict transparency and accountability rules. This year's approved appropriations include.

Hatchery Operations:

- \$330,000 annually (FY 2026 & 2027) for Yakama Nation hatchery operations to boost prey for southern resident orcas.

Pinniped Management:

- \$560,000 annually (FY 2026 & 2027) for managing pinniped populations in the Lower Columbia River to support Chinook salmon recovery.

- Yakama Nation (Tract C North): \$3,300

Safe Drinking Water Access:

- \$685,000 annually (FY 2026 & 2027) to assist homes and small systems with contaminated wells.

Nitrate Mitigation in Lower Yakima Valley:

- \$1.69 million to implement the nitrate water hazard mitigation plan, including education, well testing, and alternative water supplies.

Yakama Tribal Compact School:

- \$4.216 million under the Small District and STEC Schools Modernization Program.

Yakama Detox Center:

- \$5.05 million allocated for facility development.

SITE REVIEW SPOTLIGHT

In 2024, an independent court appeals assessment provided valuable insights and recommendations to strengthen our tribal court judicial system. This evaluation supports our ongoing efforts to enhance justice services and uphold community trust.

The assessment aligns with the **Trial Court Performance Standards (TCPS)** a comprehensive, outcome-oriented framework that helps courts:

- Set and monitor performance targets,
- Evaluate effectiveness,
- Understand public perception,
- And continuously improve practices and policies.

By adopting the TCPS framework, our court system is better equipped to ensure transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to community needs.

The **Justice Services Department** remains committed to working collaboratively with all partners to implement process improvements that reflect these standards and elevate the quality of justice in our community.

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