



Just going from paper to having a digital case management system was a massive transformation for the office. The second transition has been going to a data driven approach, where leveraging and reviewing our data has changed our relationships internally within our office and externally – with the courts, the County Council, the media and the public at large. All of those things are different now because instead of getting an opinion, usually about what another group thinks we need to change, we can show them real data about what is happening. It's no longer "We don't like this," but an opportunity to ask "What is really going on here?"

David Baker,
*Data Analytics Manager,
King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office*

SUMMARY:

The King County, Washington Prosecuting Attorney's Office represents the state in criminal matters and serves as the county's legal advisors. The office employs more than 600 attorneys and staff, making it one of the larger prosecuting attorneys' offices in the nation. The office serves 2.2 million people and manages approximately 6,000 felony cases annually.

The prosecutor's office moved from manual, paper management of all of their cases to PROSECUTORbyKarpel (PbK) in 2013 and has been using PbK not just for the management of all of their criminal prosecution files, but also for data collection about their work. King County is a leader in terms of the transparency they provide to the public about their work. The data provided by PbK, with analysis in the Microsoft PowerBI tool, allows the prosecutor's office to interact with the public and other governmental offices based on facts – improving efficiency and resource allocation.

Past Challenges:



BENEFITS OF THE TRANSITION:



Transitioning paper records to electronic records.



Accountability in terms of understanding the workload of attorneys, departments, and the agency.



Improved communication with other agencies through clear and authoritative data.



Workflow customization for different offenses, courts, locations, and departments.



Effective budget allocation based on data and needs.



Public-facing dashboard for full transparency.



Recognition and identification of employees with outstanding track records.



Feature additions and upgrades according to requests to the vendor.



Extensive training for employees during the transition to the new system.



Ability to ingest prior data, even in a proprietary format.



Rapid ability to integrate work from home when the pandemic required it.



Ability to rapidly identify cases affected by frequent legislative changes and prioritize cases for processing.



Fast execution of justice following changes to the law, release of those who were unconstitutionally charged.

MOVING TO DIGITAL: WORKFLOW AND TRAINING

In choosing a case management system, one of the key capabilities was the ability to handle different workflows. Washington State has a highly decentralized court structure, so every county and court has local rules. Workflows vary per role or example, paralegals and legal assistants have specific workflows. Also, every type of case has different requirements that determine the workflow of the cases. It was important for the county to choose a software system that would provide multiple workflows based on all of the different requirements.

Although almost all of the work was done with paper documentation, King County had some amount of data stored in a proprietary DOS system. Although it wasn't the bulk of the information, it was a fair amount of data including case numbers, so the fact that PbK could import the legacy data was a bonus for the team.

“Our partnership with PbK has been a major boost for data transparency in King County’s criminal justice system – enhancing our capacity for evidence-based decisions and our accessibility to the constituents we serve. The ability to customize the platform to meet the unique legal landscape in King County, as well as the needs of our attorneys and staff, is helping modernize our practice in numerous ways.”

- King County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Satterberg



TECHNICAL SOLUTION

The solution included a number of technical aspects and modules to serve the prosecutor's



TRAINING AND TRANSITION TO PAPERLESS

While many of the younger attorneys wholeheartedly welcomed the move to digital, many of the older prosecutors were accustomed to the paper documentation and found the change difficult. "There was a transition period where there were some paper files, and over time, those paper files were scanned into PbK and then phased out," says David Baker, a prosecuting attorney who is now the Data Analytics Manager for the Prosecuting Attorney's office.

Having Karpel lead the training effort was important for the entire staff. The team led a series of group training sessions and maintained support staff to make sure that everyone was able to get on board.

RAPID RESPONSE TO CHANGE

A major payoff in terms of the responsiveness of PbK was the department's ability to handle a major change in the law that affected thousands of cases. "In early 2021, the Washington Supreme Court issued a ruling finding that the drug possession statute was unconstitutional. And they also decided to retroactively apply that going back 50 years," said Baker.

Further, people with felony offenses are not allowed to carry firearms, so they might have firearms possession offenses that are invalid due to the fact that they no longer have a past felony offense.

This type of complex legal change is possible in any judicial system, and having automated records made it possible to execute justice efficiently. In fact, when COVID hit and the department needed to help reduce the number of people in jail to protect the public health of inmates and corrections staff, they were able to rapidly identify people with minor offenses who posed the least risk to public safety.



"Frankly, I don't know how you can make those kinds of changes without a digital case management system,"

- Baker

CUSTOMIZATION AND CARE

Another major benefit cited by Baker was that Karpel is responsive to feature and customization requests. For example, at the time of installation in 2013, King County was one of the largest customers that Karpel dealt with. Unlike smaller Prosecutor's offices, King County divides its teams into "units" or divisions

The Karpel team added a feature in the software for each attorney to be identified by the unit as well as other supporting data. Another example was the recent request for an upgrade in terms of ethnicity and race data stored for demographic purposes. Karpel was able to add the customization to more accurately represent demographic data, allowing King County to update the system and present more representative data to the public.

LEADING THE WAY IN DATA TRANSPARENCY

Automating case handling with PbK immediately provided a higher level of visibility. As a result, King County has evolved into a leader in terms of data accountability, implementing a public dashboard so that everyone has access to the information about the prosecutor's office.

Over time, King County has shifted from just using the default information in PbK to integrating with Microsoft's PowerBI analytics tool so they can use the data in a myriad of ways. Improving capabilities has allowed the prosecutor's office to adapt internal operations and improve relationships and communication with other organizations and the public.



KNOW THYSELF: DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS AND BUDGETING

Internal accountability shifted quickly once the systems were automated. Supervisors could see exactly how many cases each attorney was handling, how the caseload was distributed, and how cases were being resolved. "We found out there were some really quiet people who are extremely productive. They do a really good job, but they're not self-promoters," says Baker. The system allowed the office to identify and promote people based on their actual performance.

Further, by understanding its caseload, the team can allocate resources and make budget requests more effectively. Recently, the team was able to increase their budget based on clear and provable data about the increase in violent crime cases that were being submitted to the office.

Understanding the data helps the department allocate resources most efficiently as well. "Budgets are always limited, so having data helps you allocate that budget to where it makes the most difference," adds Baker.

THE FUTURE: MORE DATA

The benefits of using a data-driven system are profound, and the King County Prosecuting Attorney's office plans to continue digging deeper into the potential of that data to help improve services.

We have transitioned to this idea that we can capture any data you want in PbK. And if we can't do it right now, Karpel can make it so that you can capture it. And so the question is twofold of how do you get your work done efficiently and in such a way that it captures the data. We can show the severity of crimes, some race and ethnicity data, and now we are moving into getting better information on DUIs to find out things like levels of intoxication, passengers and children in the car, and whether firearms were also involved. If you can think creatively, you can really capture and start to understand details about cases that no one had ever imagined would be possible. All of this gives us a totally different understanding of the criminal justice system, how to prioritize and provide better public service.

David Baker,
Data Analytics Manager,
King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office

BENEFITS SUMMARY



Ability to rapidly adapt to legislative, judicial and public health policy changes.



Accountability for work across the department and the ability to identify top performers.



Efficient budgeting and resource allocation.



Public-facing transparency.



Faster execution of justice and case handling.



Reduction in administrative overhead.



Transition of paper files throughout the department to digital record keeping.



Improved communication with courts, county government, police, and other public offices.



Implementation of multiple workflows.



Customizations and feature upgrades according to their specific needs.

ABOUT KING COUNTY WASHINGTON PROSECUTING ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

The King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office employs over 600 people, attorneys and staff. King County, which includes Seattle, has an approximate population of 2.2 million . The Office is comprised of four divisions: the Family Support Division which represents the state in family law matters, Civil Division which serves as the County's in-house law firm, the Juvenile Division which represents the state in juvenile criminal cases, and the Criminal Division which represents the state and the county in criminal matters in King County District and Superior Courts, the state and federal courts of appeal, and the Washington and U.S. Supreme Courts. The Criminal Division is responsible for prosecuting all felonies in King County and all misdemeanors in unincorporated areas of King County.

ABOUT KARPEL SOLUTIONS

St. Louis-based Karpel Solutions is a business and government solutions and managed services provider that helps clients achieve their strategic goals through the application of cutting-edge, cost-effective technologies. PROSECUTORbyKarpel is the most widely used case management software in the United States. Founded in 1985, Karpel is a four-time Inc. 5000 company, providing business solutions that mobilize technology to meet specific business needs. Karpel Solutions employs more than 80 business professionals and technology experts with experience in various industries. PROSECUTORbyKarpel is used by over 600 clients in 31 states with over 14,000 users nationwide. For additional information visit <https://www.prosecutorbykarpel.com/>