



THE DAY AFTER PRISON

REENTRY SERVICES

Courses & Learning

WASHINGTON STATE JUDICIAL SYSTEM OVERVIEW



The following is an educational conversation between David and Marina regarding general procedures of the Judicial System in the state of Washington.



David

Hey Marina, I've been trying to understand how the legal process works here in Washington state. Do you have any idea?



Marina

Absolutely, David. It all starts with an investigation. Once the authorities gather enough evidence, they might arrest a suspect right away or it might take some time.



David

Is it always the case that they arrest someone right away after gathering evidence?



Marina

Not necessarily. Sometimes the authorities might choose to delay an arrest if they need more evidence to strengthen the case, or if they want to avoid tipping off other suspects involved in a larger investigation. They might also be waiting for forensic results or need more time to interview witnesses.



David

Interesting, so what happens if they don't arrest right away but decide to file a charge later?



Marina

In Washington state, if the authorities file charges without making an immediate arrest, the court can issue a summons for the suspect to appear in court or issue a warrant for their arrest. It depends on the seriousness of the charge and other factors, like the suspect's criminal history or flight risk.



David

Got it. So, after someone is charged or arrested, what's the next step in the process?



Marina

Well, if they're arrested, they go to an arraignment, where the suspect is formally charged in court and enters a plea—guilty, not guilty, or sometimes no contest. If they received a summons instead, they would appear at the arraignment without being arrested.



David

And if they plead not guilty, the case goes through pre-trial and maybe to trial?

Exactly. If a not guilty plea is entered, the case heads to the pre-trial phase with hearings and discovery. If it doesn't settle during this phase, it proceeds to trial, where both sides present their cases to a judge or jury.



After the trial, how is the verdict decided?

If it's a jury trial, the jury will deliberate and announce a verdict. In a bench trial, the judge will make the decision.



I see. What if they're found guilty?

Then we move to sentencing, where the judge decides on the punishment based on various factors. But if they're found not guilty, they're released.



Is that the end, or can there be more?

A guilty verdict can be appealed if there are grounds for it, such as potential legal errors during the trial. This means a higher court may review the case.



Thanks for clearing this up, Marina. It's a detailed process, but now I understand it better!

Anytime, David. It's important to know how the system works to ensure justice is appropriately served.



Resources on Washington State criminal procedures:

Title 10 RCW: CRIMINAL PROCEDURE

The criminal justice process - King County, Washington

The Criminal Justice Process | Spokane County, WA