**INTRODUCTION**

The Judicial System of the United States consists of courts at various levels. Most prominent is the Federal Court System, which resolves cases at either the Trial Court (or District Court) level, Circuit Court or Supreme Court, depending on the facts of the cases, level of jurisdiction and right of appeal. In the United states, each state has a fully functioning court system that runs in parallel to the Federal Court system.

A vast majority of civil and criminal cases within the United States are resolved through the State Court system. Back in 2006, a record high total of 102 million cases newly filed, reopened, and reactivated cases reported to the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ Court Statistics Project (CSP) were filed in state courts all over the country. More than 50% of these cases fall arise from traffic violations, and these cases can be resource intensive for the courts to process and adjudicate. In previous years, when the number of cases increased without a corresponding increase in the number of judicial officers working on those cases, the number of cases that needed to be resolved increased by up to 5%. This puts a strain on the court systems of various states within the United States.

Civil and criminal cases within state courts typically run in a few key stages (1) arraignment, or arrest of the person charged within the crime (2) case setting, that involves prosecutors laying out the facts of the case and identifying the charges on which the case will be contested (3) trial or plea bargaining, as the case may be and (4) case resolution, verdict and sentencing.

While a large number of cases are filed every year for serious crimes that are expected to result in harsher punishments, many cases that are filed in state courts within the United States often involve lower level crimes that are not serious enough to merit a prison sentence longer than a year. Hence, a large number of people that are charged with crimes are not detained in prison during the various stages of the case. This ensures that persons are detained in jails only if required, and keeping in mind the capacity of jails themselves to house a certain number of persons.

Between 1990 and 2004, 62% of felony defendants in State courts in the 75 largest counties within the United States were released prior to the disposition of their case. Starting in 1998, financial pretrial releases, requiring the posting of a bail amount, were more prevalent than non-financial releases. Among defendants detained until case disposition, 1 in 6 had been denied bail and 5 in 6 had bail set with financial conditions required for release that were not met. Bail amounts were set to be higher for more serious crimes, or for cases where there was prior criminal history, with murder defendants being least likely to be released pretrial.

In order for the court system to function smoothly in terms of resolving cases, it is important that defendants that are released before trial return to the courthouse for subsequent hearings whenever they are summoned. Failure of a defendant to appear before a judge is highly problematic in carrying on with case hearings as scheduled, and may result in worse outcomes for such defendants in the cases itself. This often leads to postponement in hearings. In court systems that have limited resources and rising caseloads, it is important that cases can be resolved to completion as quickly as is possible.

The King County Prosecuting Attorney’s office is one such court that experiences the problem of cases being delayed due to defendants failing to appear before a judge, resulting in cases taking longer to be completed to resolution. There is limited knowledge available in terms of how difficult the situation is in various courts within the United States.

Hence, this project is an effort in quantifying the situation. The goal of this exercise is to identify possible causes for cases being delayed in courts, and to find out ways in which those root causes can be addressed moving forward.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The resolution of cases in courts of all levels is delayed for many possible reasons, one of which involves defendants failing to appear before a judge. The King County Prosecuting Attorney is one such court that faces this problem and wants to use data from past cases to identify potential solutions to this problem. To do so, this paper will address the question of what factors affect the rate at which defendants fail to appear, and these findings could be used to identify actions that could be taken to address this issue.

A special report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in November 2007 highlighted the trend at which defendants were released before trial. It also examined the impact of demographic and case related factors on outcomes concerning pretrial release. At the state level, it found that pretrial release of defendants slightly dropped over time, with defendants more often needing to furnish bail through instruments like surety bonds. The bureau also found that defendants on financial release were more likely to follow through on future court appearances than others, while being less likely to be rearrested and charged with misconduct before trial. One out of every four defendants that failed to appear were found to be fugitives after 1 year, with those furnishing surety bonds least likely among all to be fugitives. The data used pertained to cases between 1990 and 2004 in large counties within the US.

Dobbie, Goldin and Yang (2018) analyzed the impact of pretrial detention on outcomes for defendants during and after trials. They found that detention prior to trial, as well as release with financial conditions, did not have a significant effect on future crime, while increasing the likelihood of convictions on account of defendants pleading guilty due to their weaker bargaining positions. There is very little other literature in the public domain dealing with a data driven analysis of factors driving defendant failure to appear.

The above mentioned sources both state that demographic factors are closely related to defendant outcomes. However, the King County Courthouse, like other courts in large counties in the United States has measures in place to deal with defendants that turn into fugitives or engage in crimes that require rearrest.

Since the end goal is to reduce the time taken for a case to be completed in court, this paper will seek to address why defendants fail to appear in court. Based on the data available, we will seek to identify patterns in the circumstances that result in defendants failing to appear. Understanding why this happens will allow us to arrive at potential measures that the King County Courthouse can take to deal with defendants that fail to appear in court.