

# HIGH UTILIZER INITIATIVE

## One Year in Review



Seattle City Attorney's Office  
**Ann Davison**, City Attorney

## Executive Summary

One year ago, City Attorney Ann Davison launched the High Utilizer Initiative, a collaborative effort to identify and reduce the impact of individuals responsible for repeat criminal activity across Seattle. In total, the initiative included 168 individuals who were responsible for almost 3,500 misdemeanor referrals since 2017. Those police referrals represent a fraction of the high utilizers' total criminal impact. This report details the outcomes of the initiative after its first year.

The principal purpose of the High Utilizer Initiative is to ensure individuals committing the most crime receive focused attention. Here, that extra attention means: (1) faster review of cases; (2) faster charging decisions; (3) significant coordination with Seattle Police to take action on active warrants; (4) increased coordination with the King County Prosecutor's Office on filing or resolving felony cases; (5) and collaboration with service providers where services are appropriate. In short, the goal is to make sure high utilizers do not fall through system cracks and commit repeat offenses without intervention which includes accountability.

The initial results of this intensive effort have been striking. Many of the most active, repeat criminal defendants from the past several years – people involved in daily criminal activity, often in the same neighborhoods – were significantly disrupted in the past year. Before the initiative, the high utilizer cohort averaged 6.3 misdemeanor criminal referrals to the City Attorney's Office per year. During the initiative, that number dropped to 2.7. And for individuals who exited the initiative, the average was 0.6.

The principal reason for the significant drop in high utilizer criminal activity was that they were quickly held accountable and booked into jail for their criminal activity. In Seattle, most misdemeanor defendants cannot be booked into the King County Jail under current booking restrictions. King County granted an exception for high utilizers. As a result, 142 of 168 high utilizers were booked into jail. Holding high utilizers accountable for repeat criminal conduct is the game-changer that reduced their impact on the City.

The City Attorney's Office estimates that, in the first year of operation, the High Utilizer Initiative was able to eliminate over 750 criminal police referrals reflecting many thousands of criminal acts. (For context, the City Attorney's Office received approximately 6,000 non-domestic violence, non-traffic misdemeanor referrals in 2022, so the 750 fewer referrals received in connection with high utilizers is equivalent to over 12 percent of that caseload). These statistics under-state the actual impact of the program for some neighborhoods because most high utilizers repeatedly targeted the same areas or even the same business on a daily basis.

The High Utilizer Initiative also worked with service providers to coordinate services for many individuals, including shelter and housing options after exiting jail and mandatory treatment programs in lieu of jail. While these efforts produced a handful of notable successes, the overall effort to get high utilizers to engage with services produced poor results. In particular, a

significant number of individuals were released from jail to in-patient facilities for substance use disorders. In all but a few of those cases, the defendant absconded from the program within the first 24 hours.

In sum, for the past year the High Utilizer Initiative has focused intensive attention around the most impactful individuals committing repeat misdemeanor criminal activity in Seattle. That effort was a significant success that meaningfully reduced the high utilizers' criminal activity.

## Initiative Overview

The High Utilizer Initiative is a collaborative partnership launched by the City Attorney's Office that includes the Seattle Police Department, King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, King County Jail, and service providers.

118 individuals were selected for inclusion in the initial cohort of the High Utilizer Initiative. The criteria for selection is that individuals have at least 12 misdemeanor referrals to the City Attorney's Office within a five-year period, and at least one referral in the last eight months. Some high utilizers had been criminally active for more than two decades. Other high utilizers were identified after a surge of crime in the past year.

Individuals meeting the baseline high utilizer criteria are further screened within the City Attorney's Office to eliminate individuals whose primary crimes are domestic violence or driving related, as those crimes are already given a high level of attention and scrutiny elsewhere in the criminal justice system. The City Attorney's Office then evaluates each person and considers their criminal history, input from the Seattle Police Department, input from the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, input from service providers, and their overall impact on public safety and the community where their crimes are principally committed. With all that input, the City Attorney's Office then determines the most appropriate individuals for the High Utilizer Initiative.

The predominant issue for almost all of the high utilizer population is substance use, particularly fentanyl and methamphetamine. Some high utilizers (21 percent) also had mental health/incompetency findings while part of the initiative. As a general matter, the City Attorney's Office tried to exclude individuals whose mental health conditions were severe and who had consistent incompetency findings.

The initiative strives to focus on individuals who are currently the most criminally active. Every quarter, the City Attorney's Office updates the initiative to ensure the most impactful people are included.

In total, 51 individuals have been removed from the initiative. Individuals who stop committing criminal activity (not due to temporary incarceration) are removed from the list. In addition, in considering whether to remove an individual, the City Attorney’s Office gives great weight to an individual’s successful engagement with service providers, including active engagement with mental health treatment and/or addiction treatment and securing housing. Finally, the City Attorney’s Office considers any other relevant information from our public safety partners before exiting an individual from the initiative.

Individuals in the High Utilizer Initiative are eligible for booking into the King County Jail for otherwise non-bookable misdemeanor offenses and warrants. These individuals are also ineligible to participate in the Seattle Municipal Court’s Community Court, a diversionary court that is inappropriate for this population.

## Initiative Overview – Key Data

### High Utilizer Police Referrals

The high utilizers have been responsible for nearly 3,500 police referrals to the City Attorney’s Office since the start of 2017. Criminal referrals significantly drop for those meeting the criteria once someone is involved with the initiative.

Total Referrals from HUI Population	
Before HUI	3176
In HUI	303
After HUI	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>3496</b>

## High Utilizer Population

The initial high utilizer list consisted of 118 individuals and has been adjusted each quarter. 51 people exited the initiative, including seven who passed away (discussed on [pages 11 and 12](#)). The current cohort includes 117 individuals .

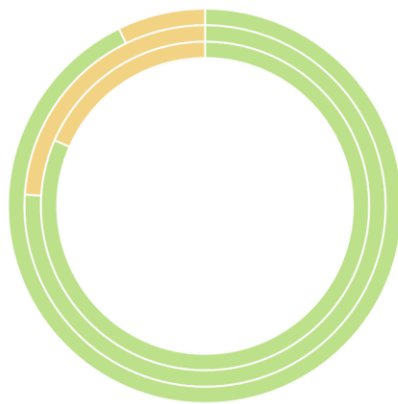
High Utilizer Population	
Unique People	168
Current Population	117
Exits	51
Deaths	8

## High Utilizer Demographics

The high utilizer population closely mirrors the demographics of Seattle police referrals to the City Attorney’s Office overall and the King County Jail. Of note: a single person added or removed can have a substantial impact on relative percentages.

HUI Demographics - Gender		
	Male	Female
High Utilizer Initiative	82%	18%
All Seattle Misd. Referrals	76%	24%
King County Jail	93%	7%

HUI Demographics - Race				
	Asian	Black	Indigenous	White
High Utilizer Initiative	4%	32%	6%	58%
All Seattle Misd. Referrals	5%	37%	2%	56%
King County Jail	8%	40%	2%	49%

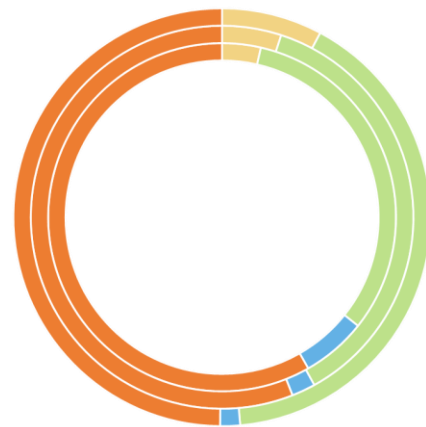


■ Male ■ Female

**Inner Ring:**  
High Utilizers

**Middle Ring:**  
All Referrals

**Outer Ring:**  
King County Jail



■ Asian ■ Black ■ Indigenous ■ White

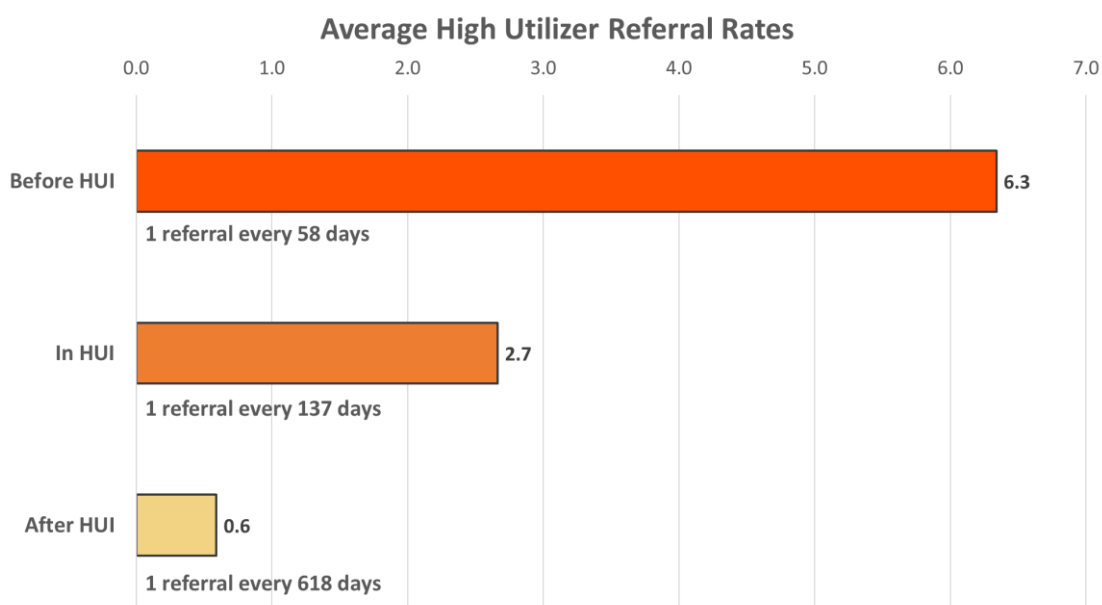
## Finding 1: The initiative significantly reduced high utilizer public safety impacts

### A: Estimated Net Reduction in Criminal Referrals

**The City Attorney’s Office estimates that the High Utilizer Initiative resulted in 750 fewer police referrals, and thousands fewer criminal incidents.**

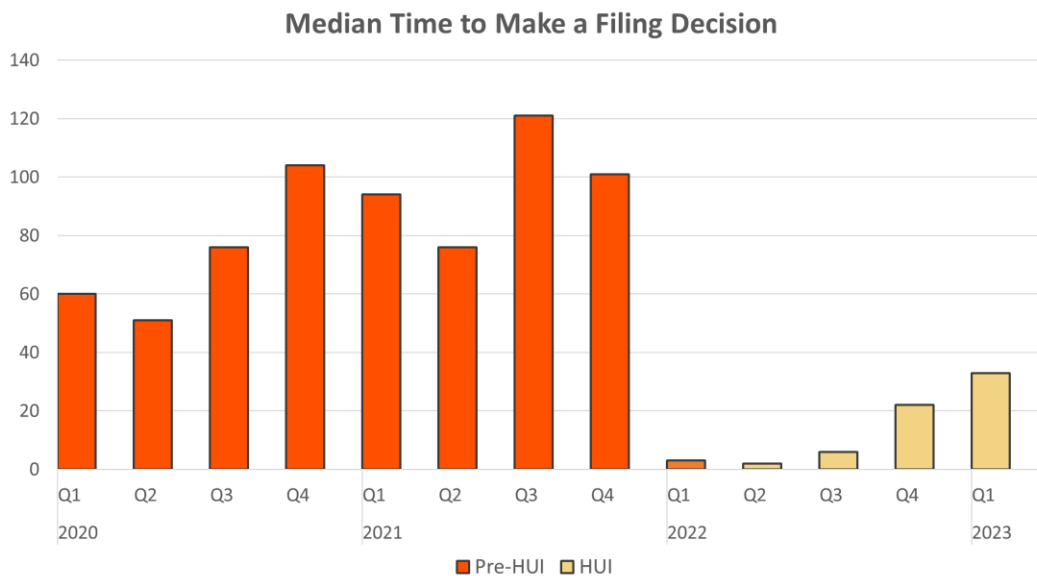
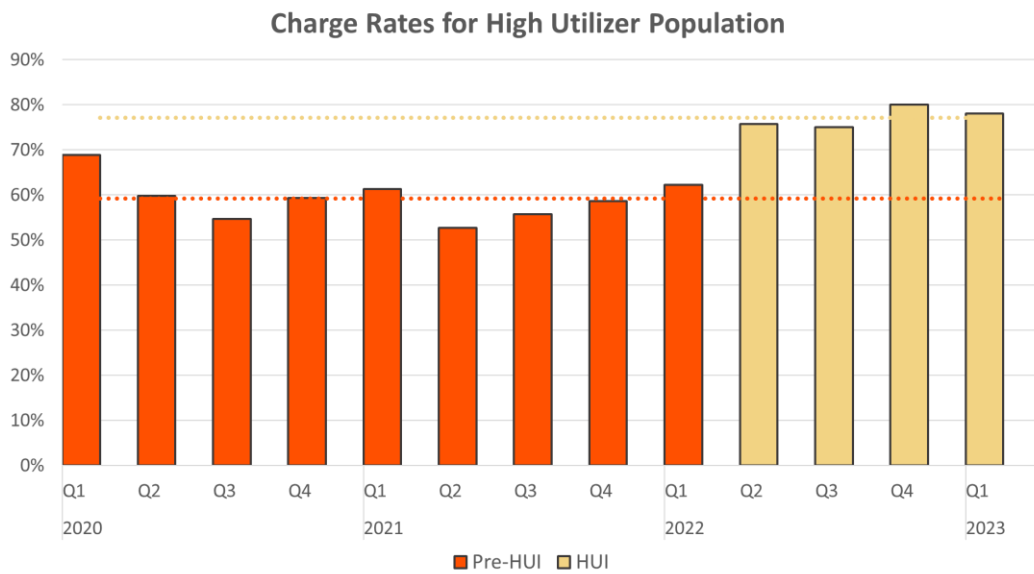
The most common crimes committed by the high utilizer population were theft and trespasses at businesses – stealing goods to sell for money for fentanyl and meth. These crimes often lead to more serious charges – assaults on employees, robbery if someone attempts to stop them, burglary if they commit shoplifts when they are trespassed, etc. The pattern of activity for most high utilizers is to commit the same crimes in the same locations over and over.

Only a small fraction of these crimes generate a police referral to the City Attorney’s Office. Nevertheless, those referrals (while not telling the whole story) are a strong indicator of overall community impact. On average, prior to becoming part of the initiative, high utilizers had one misdemeanor referral to the City Attorney’s Office every 58 days or 6.3 per year. Some were much more prolific. Once being identified as a high utilizer, the rate of referrals fell by 57 percent. For those who exited the initiative, criminal referrals dropped by over 90 percent.



## B: Charging Rates

Once police referrals are received by the City Attorney’s Office, they are reviewed for a filing decision (a decision to file the charges, divert to alternatives or decline the case). As noted below, the City Attorney’s Office increased the overall charging rate and reduced case declines by 20 percent for high utilizers.

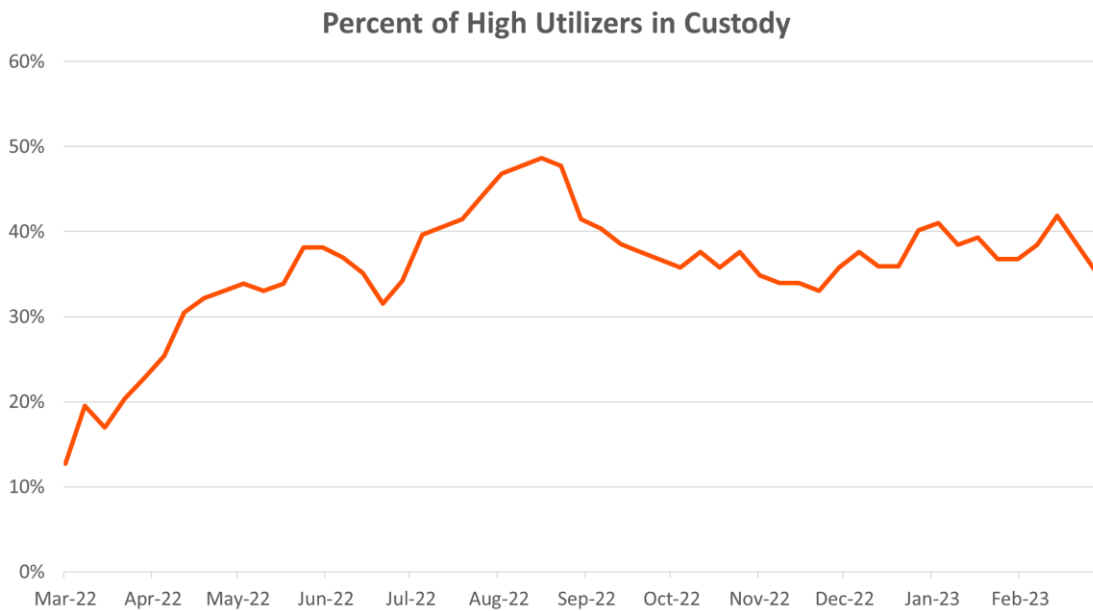


The Close-in-Time policy lowered the decision time for all referrals including the ones that belong to high utilizers. The increases in Q4 2022 and Q1 2023 reflect some of the staffing challenges in the department.

## C: Jail Bookings

The High Utilizer Initiative has been able to provide a meaningful disruption in criminal activity for most of the individuals who were included. This reduced the impact of their criminal activities and had a lasting impact beyond their time in custody.

HUI Booking Statistics	
Bookings	324
Unique Individuals	142
Days Served	16586



While roughly 40 percent of the high utilizers in the initiative have been in custody at any given time, almost all of them have been in custody at some point during the first year of the initiative. The sharp drops correspond to when a new list is released with new individuals.

## D: Reduced Resource Use

From March 7<sup>th</sup> 2022 to March 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, the City Attorney's Office received 6,053 non-domestic violence, non-criminal misdemeanor police referrals. This means that the High Utilizer Initiative likely reduced the non-traffic/non-domestic violence case load of the City Attorney's Office by 11 percent or more (based on an estimated reduction of 750 referrals). This effect would also have been felt by other public safety partner organizations. For example, those 750 fewer criminal police referrals to the City Attorney's Office would be reflective of several thousand fewer incidents that Seattle Police were called for a response.



## E: Examples of Reduced Public Safety Impact

### *Dylan J:*

Prior to being identified a high utilizer, Dylan had amassed 17 referrals to the City Attorney's Office in a 14-month span, mostly theft and trespass from two large retail building stores on Aurora Avenue North. But those 17 cases did not fully tell the story of daily life as an employee of these stores or a nearby resident. North-end businesses reported near-daily theft often accompanied with harassment and/or threatening words and actions with makeshift weapons. After being identified as a high utilizer, Dylan was subsequently arrested by SPD on 5/14/22 and has remained in custody since that date on \$29,000 bail. He is currently charged with 7 separate cases by the City, to include 4 counts of criminal trespass, 6 counts of theft, 1 count of violation of an anti-harassment order, and 1 count of assault against an SPD officer. He is also charged with one felony case at King County, to include 14 counts of burglary in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, 3 counts of violation of an anti-harassment order and 1 count of organized retail theft in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree. Dylan recently entered a resolution of his felony and misdemeanor cases where he will be required to attend a residential drug treatment program, and required to comply with substance use treatment or else be sentenced to prison.

### *Petrina Y:*

Petrina was identified by the Ballard neighborhood as one of its most prolific offenders. Since 2017, Petrina had a total of 46 cases referred to the City Attorney's Office. Almost all the referrals occurred in Ballard and resulted in property damage, theft, harassment and assault toward a variety of small businesses and their employees. In addition to creating fear in the neighborhood, Petrina was a drain on SPD North Precinct resources, as they were constantly responding to calls for service about her. Since being designated as a high utilizer in 2022, Petrina had only 3 referrals to the City Attorney's Office that year. Importantly, she has not yet had a single referral in 2023.

### *Levi S:*

In 2022, Levi had 17 misdemeanor referrals to the City Attorney's Office. All cases were filed, and they included charges for criminal trespass, theft, and harassment. He was also charged by King County with one felony burglary 2<sup>nd</sup> degree case. Due to a deteriorating condition of his leg, he was continually declined (a term referred to as a "medical decline") from the King County jail when SPD arrested him. After many attempts, he was eventually booked into jail and remained in custody for a period of time until being released to a residential treatment program in Spokane. However, Levi failed to comply with treatment, and began to commit crimes in Spokane. After being arrested in Spokane, he was transported back to Seattle and is currently in custody here due to the high utilizer work.

### *John L:*

Prior to being placed on the high utilizer list, John made national news when he stole a large flat screen television from the downtown Target. He was subsequently added to the high utilizer list and has 11 pending misdemeanor cases, to include 8 counts of theft, 7 counts of criminal trespass 1<sup>st</sup> degree, and 3 counts of harassment. He also has 5 pending felony matters at King County, to include 4 counts of burglary 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, 1 count theft 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, 1 count robbery 2<sup>nd</sup> degree, and 1 count VUCSA. He was arrested by SPD on 8/27/22 and given a temporary release to engage in substance use disorder treatment on 12/7/22. SPD arrested him again on 1/2/2023 for felony burglary and he remains in custody on \$137,550 bail.

*Christopher T:*

Christopher had 9 referrals to the City in 2022 and was charged with 4 felonies: 3 counts of burglary 2<sup>nd</sup> degree and 1 count of organized retail theft 1<sup>st</sup> degree. He was added to the high utilizer list towards the end of the year and was almost immediately arrested by SPD. He is currently in custody, being held on \$32,000 bail, and his misdemeanor and felony cases are pending.

*Erik H:*

Erik is a prolific shoplifter in Seattle, with 12 referrals to the City Attorney's Office in 2022 alone, and 8 more in 2021. He has 15 active misdemeanor cases, and 1 pending burglary in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree at King County. He was arrested by SPD in July 2022 and released by the court to attend substance use disorder treatment. He absconded from treatment and continued to commit additional crimes. On 1/2/23, he was arrested on his outstanding warrants. He remains in custody, being held on \$140,575 bail.

## Finding 2: High utilizers substantially failed to engage with substance use disorder treatment providers

A concerning trend over the first year of the High Utilizer Initiative was the frequency that high utilizers agreed to substance use disorder residential treatment programs as an alternative to jail and then absconded from those services before even starting their treatment program. While there were a small handful of success stories, the great majority of times in which out-of-custody addiction treatment services were offered and accepted, the defendant fled within the first 24 hours.

At least five high utilizers absconded on more than one occasion when they were given a chance to address their substance use disorders with treatment. In one case, the defendant begged for treatment, was released to a waiting transportation vehicle, and instead, fled to the car of an associate. This suggests fleeing before treatment was planned in advance, while in jail.

This very low participation rate makes a strong case for better in-custody treatment options. If individuals stabilize during in-custody time, there is an opportunity to successfully graduate the individual to out-of-custody residential treatment after they had demonstrated active participation.

Below is a cohort of high utilizers who absconded from substance use treatment offered in lieu of jail:

*Levi S.*

- 10/12/22: given a temporary release to attend a residential treatment program in Spokane and coordinated transportation to take him there
- Absconded from treatment almost immediately
- Reports from Spokane from 11/5 and 11/9 for new burglary cases
- Arrested on 12/31/22 in Spokane and eventually transported back to Seattle where he remains in custody

*John L.*

- 12/8/22: given a temporary release to addiction treatment

- Absconded from treatment
- 1/2/23: committed new burglary

*Erik H.*

- 9/20/22: given a temporary release to addiction treatment
- Absconded from treatment almost immediately
- Committed new crimes on September 14, October 8th and October 27th
- 1/2/23: arrested on warrants by SPD and remains in custody

*Abdikadir S.*

- 9/2/22: given a temporary release to addiction treatment
- 9/26/22: committed a new crime, which was the subject of an SPD Serious Incident Report

*Andrew T.*

- 1/26/23: released to addiction treatment as part of his residential DOSA and instead of getting on the bus for treatment, he absconded
- Currently has outstanding warrants

*Neil B.*

- 10/14/22: given a temporary release to addiction treatment
- 10/20/22: left treatment against medical advice
- 1/26/23: charged with OTR 2nd out of Snohomish County

## High Utilizer Deaths

Seven high utilizers passed away during the program. We bring to light their deaths because it's a reflection of the great danger posed to individuals struggling with addiction to fentanyl and meth.

*Alexandar I.:*

Alexandar was among one of the most prolific offenders of the past several years, with 38 referrals to the City. Alexandar also had several recent felonies, including two counts of organized retail theft second degree and one count of burglary in the second degree. Seattle Police arrested Alexandar on 4/9/22, and he was released on 6/2. Almost immediately, he committed a burglary at the downtown Nordstrom. Nine days later, on 6/11, he passed away from overdosing on fentanyl and methamphetamine.

*Ileana B.:*

Ileana had 26 referrals to the City between 2018 and 2022. In that same time frame, she also entered guilty pleas on three felony cases: assault 3, theft 3, and burglary second degree. Ileana passed away at the end of September 2022 from an overdose.

*Coty T.:*

Coty had 30 referrals to the City and was a prolific criminal in the North precinct. He had also been charged with two felonies – burglary second degree, and theft 3. On 10/16/22, Coty died from an overdose.

*Kenshabba B.:*

Passed away in November 2022 from a combination of methamphetamine and fentanyl overdose.

*Matthew B.:*

Matthew had 45 referrals to the city, and three felony convictions. He was released from jail on 11/29/22 and went to live in the Aurora house on 105<sup>th</sup> and Aurora. On 12/7, SPD responded to an overdose call at that location, and found Matthew, deceased, likely from fentanyl use.

*Shawn G.:*

Shawn was assaulted in downtown Seattle, resulting in his death in January 2023.

*Kenneth K.:*

Passed away in February 2023. Cause of death is unknown at this time.

## Conclusion

In its first year of operation, the High Utilizer Initiative successfully improved public safety by decreasing the impacts of the highest utilizers of Seattle public safety and criminal justice resources. The City Attorney's Office estimates, based on historical data from this population, that the initiative's crime reduction impact was thousands fewer crimes and over 750 fewer misdemeanor police referrals to the City Attorney's Office. For community members, this translated to meaningful impacts for those neighborhoods most effected by high utilizer criminal activity.

The initiative attempted to steer a number of high utilizers struggling with fentanyl and/or meth addiction to residential substance use treatment programs. Unfortunately, most high utilizers failed to engage or stay with those treatment programs. That leads us to the conclusion that most high utilizers are not ready to go direct to out-of-custody, voluntary addiction treatment programs.