

## **Taking Courageous Action: Implementing Ambitious and Impactful Programs So Everyone Can Thrive**

King County applauds the Washington State Legislature for keeping our state resilient during the pandemic while taking substantial steps to address inequities. Still, the Legislature has an opportunity to continue its progression by adopting ambitious and impactful programs, placing local governments on a solid foundation, and enabling the State's residents to thrive. The Legislature should prioritize local government funding so they can provide critical services and resolve Washington's behavioral health crisis. King County also encourages the Legislature to seek remedies for housing and homelessness, public safety, and the environment, and to continue enacting anti-racist and pro-equity policies. Finally, the Legislature needs to ensure residents have access to healthcare and that it supports mobility and governance modernization.

### **Securing Local Government Funding**

King County is heading toward a fiscal cliff if the Legislature fails to fix the arbitrary one percent property tax cap. We have put band-aids on the problem by funding specific programs through voter-approved levies, such as parks, emergency radio communications, the fingerprinting database, and our Best Starts for Kids initiative. Even with these actions, King County faces a \$140 million shortfall in our next budget if the Legislature does not act. This shortfall will force us to reduce or eliminate our ability to respond to the behavioral health crisis, opioid emergency, housing and homelessness issues, and provide core safety services. This structural gap will continue to affect future budgets, with higher inflation exacerbating the gap between revenue and cost growth. The Legislature should, at minimum, take the following actions to remedy the local government fiscal crisis in the making:

- Replace the arbitrary one percent property tax cap with a mechanism that accounts for inflation and population growth.
- Implement progressive revenue sources at the state and local levels, rather than burdening lower wage earners to pay a more significant portion of their income than others.
- Provide local governments with maximum fiscal flexibility within their limited revenue streams.

### **Strengthening Access to Behavioral Health Care**

All Washingtonians deserve access to quality behavioral health services where and when needed. The State has made recent progress in expanding and preserving behavioral health access. Still, more work must be done to provide immediate crisis services and behavioral health treatment on demand. Centering communities most harmed by racism, the State should build on previous efforts, including taking the following actions:

- Develop & sustain the essential behavioral health workforce.

- Preserve & enhance community-based behavioral health operations, including adopting policies and increasing funding for programs that support individuals and families in treatment for and recovery from substance use disorders.
- Fund capital investments to protect existing treatment beds, expand capacity, and enhance access to care.
- Address and work to streamline administrative obstacles to the efficient provision of behavioral health support and treatment, including transportation reimbursement for responders, insurance and billing practices that prevent appropriate financial remuneration for behavioral health services, and licensure requirements for workers in behavioral health facilities.
- Enhance the community-based response to behavioral health crises, including providing necessary resources to raise 988 crisis line public awareness, education and outreach, particularly for our youths.

## **Four Pillars Priorities**

### **Tackling Housing and Homelessness**

King County needs more equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable homes for individuals experiencing homelessness and communities at risk of severe cost burden and displacement. The State made historic housing investments in 2022, but the scale of the homelessness and housing crises exceed even these resources.

- Enhance past budget and policy actions, including making robust investments in housing capital, operations, and services.
- Improve housing stability for renters.
- Enact state policies to advance development and construction of missing middle housing.

### **Providing an Equitable Public Safety and Justice System**

We must break harmful cycles and implement programs critical to transforming the criminal legal system and reimagine how we deliver public safety. We need to walk away from practices that no longer meet our values and move toward new models of partnership that bring genuine community safety for all residents. Each of us needs to know that when we need help, the right person will be there to provide it. And yet, the public safety network is facing critical staffing shortages at all levels: law enforcement, community-based safety partners, corrections facilities, behavioral health providers, and criminal legal system partners. The Legislature can address public safety by taking the following steps:

- Invest in all components of local governments' public safety staffing;
- Maintain the intent of previous law enforcement accountability reforms while seeking improvements for operational implementation—we can have public safety *and* ensure that communities of color are not subject to harsher interactions and punishment for crimes.

- Address gun violence through prevention, including continued restrictions on firearms and support for anti-gun violence programs and initiatives.
- Expand innovative diversion efforts that address root causes and have better long-term outcomes for public safety and the wellness of our communities.
- Examine methods to increase juror participation and diversity, including increased juror pay and improved juror accessibility.

### **Environmental Stewardship**

Climate change is upon us, and Washingtonians are living through recurring crises, such as heat events, wildfires, and floods. Also, Washington’s environment and people continue to face ongoing pressures from population growth and pollution. It is our responsibility to the communities we serve and to the generations that follow to do everything we can, as soon as we can, to mitigate and prepare for the climate crisis and address ongoing environmental decline—our lives and livelihoods depend on it. The Legislature can take urgent action by addressing the following:

- Maximize local distribution of state and federal infrastructure funds to help counties address climate change at the local level through investments in transit, building and vehicle electrification, clean energy supplies, sustainable and safe transportation systems, climate-resilient infrastructure, and clean water and healthy habitat programs.
- Continue to enhance and grow product stewardship programs to make products safer for people and the planet, from design to disposal.
- Support updates to land use planning and permitting that align policies with state emission reduction goals and accelerate resiliency and habitat recovery.
- Support equitable climate solutions and an equitable green jobs transition by investing in expanded partnerships with frontline communities and community-based organizations across sectors such as policymaking, workforce development, economic development, environmental education, and community health and services.
- Create a capital investment grant program for long term care and similar facilities to upgrade HVAC systems that reduce harm from wildfire smoke.
- Establish greenhouse reduction goals at the regional and county level and a framework for implementation via reasonable regional, county, and local efforts.

### **Maintaining and Expanding Pro-Equity and Anti-Racist Policies**

In recent years, the Legislature has made historic strides in overcoming the systematic bias and racism woven into our society. We must continue to right our past wrongs, including:

- Increase community-based resources that address hate and bias crimes and incidents.
- Pursue legislation that seeks equity for people with disabilities.
- Continue funding until courts have addressed all cases needing resentencing under the Washington State Supreme Court’s *Blake* decision.

## **Additional Priorities**

### **Ensure Access to Complete Healthcare**

King County residents face obstacles in obtaining comprehensive healthcare, including accessing abortion services, hospital beds, and the Monkeypox vaccine. Even though Washington protects reproductive health rights, the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision will undoubtedly affect access to abortions. Traveling patients, out-of-state provider liability, and hospital consolidation restrict reproductive healthcare access.

- Pass legislation that ensures providers can treat patients seeking reproductive healthcare without repercussion and residents can access those providers even with increased demand and decreasing capacity.
- Increase resources for Monkeypox vaccines.

Also, COVID-19 has created a pent-up demand for medical care. This demand, combined with behavioral health issues, guardianship, and workforce issues, has maxed out hospital capacity and impacted hospital access. For Harborview Medical Center, these stressors have caused Harborview to go greatly over its licensed bed capacity. The Legislature should pass legislation ensuring patients can access medical care in hospitals.

- Take action to increase the ability of Harborview Medical Center and other hospitals to discharge patients who no longer need hospital care, thereby ensuring capacity for patients who do.

### **Mobility**

As more and more people call King County home, our transportation system continues to need support. This support includes expanding funding for commute trip reduction and transit demand management systems, roads, and other forms of transportation including state and county ferry systems.

- Increase revenue and provide tools to local governments to preserve local roads.

### **Good Governance**

King County asks that the Legislature continue to adopt legislation addressing governmental modernization and streamlining procedures, such as aligning civil service requirements with cities, accounting for technological advances, and making procurement processes more equitable. Our electoral system must also be protected and kept up to date. Therefore, the Legislature should enact protections for our electoral process and seek opportunities to meet voter access needs.

- Recognize that social service providers are critical partners in taking care of residents across the state, and allow social service providers to be reimbursed for the full amount of their costs by eliminating caps on administrative and overhead costs.