

SHERIFF

KING COUNTY

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Susan L. Rahr
Sheriff

June 1, 2009

The Honorable Kurt Triplett
King County Executive
701 Fifth Avenue, Suite 3210
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: King County Sheriff's Office 2010 Budget

Dear Executive Triplett:

Enclosed please find the proposed 2010 King County Sheriff's Office budget. This proposed budget successfully meets your target reduction of \$7,034,495.

On March 26, 2009 I wrote you to express my concerns over the target reduction approach being taken by the Executive's Budget Office during these dire fiscal circumstances. During the last budget cycle the Sheriff's Office and other Law, Safety and Justice Agencies shouldered virtually all of the real general fund budget reductions resulting in 65 positions being cut from the Sheriff's office in 2009; 47 of these positions sworn police officers. We were forced to cut 11 more positions to balance the deficit created by the Benson and Lea Hill annexations. By contrast, according to the final 2009 budget striker, it appears Executive controlled general fund agencies took no net full time position cuts.

Upon review of the 2010 budget target reductions for the general fund, it is apparent we are headed for a repeat of last year's unproductive budget process. I did not see any evidence of prioritization in the target reductions. I was surprised to see that executive controlled agencies have been spared the majority of target cuts by having their budgets reduced 2.9% versus 8.6% for most direct service providers. Some departments, such as the Office of Information and Resource Management, were completely spared from any reductions. The manner in which specific targets were assessed appears to be in direct contrast to the Executive's Budget Office business plan instructions given on March 16th of this year which state that under the Executive's priorities "*direct services to the public will be prioritized over administrative functions*". Your target cuts seem to indicate the exact opposite; that the County favors cutting prosecutors, judges and police officers over administrative positions. This is surprising in light of the Council's directive for budget deliberations for 2010 "*to identify sufficient funding for patrol and law enforcement activities necessary to maintain public safety in the unincorporated areas and the region as a whole, along with sufficient funding to provide needed equipment for regional*

emergency services.” We are ready to work with you in a creative and productive way to meet the expectation of King County residents and Council members to make public safety a priority.

One of the statistics frequently cited by the Executive’s Budget Office is that law, safety and justice consumes more than 70% of the general fund. This “fact” is usually portrayed as the primary reason there is a deficit in the general fund. *Revenues* generated by criminal justice agencies are left out of the discussion and budgeted *expenditures* are lumped together without regard to how each individual agency is managed. In fact the King County Sheriff’s Office contracting program is now the third largest revenue source for the general fund, behind real estate and sales taxes and will provide the County nearly \$61 million in revenue in 2010. As I have pointed out in years past the net cost of the Sheriff’s Office is less of a burden on the general fund than it was in 1997! This is due to our efficient use of resources and the growth in our contracting program, which provides mutual advantage to both the cities and King County. Other key reasons for this success have been our ability to obtain federal grants and congressional support and our continuous process of reprioritizing.

Interestingly, King County’s expenditures have grown 64% since 2004. During this same time frame, Law, Safety and Justice departments grew just 24%, - just under 4% per year; the lowest of any County program area. If you analyze the growth in criminal justice expenditures by agency, the highest Criminal Justice growth rates are in the jail, jail health and other agencies managed by the Executive’s Office.

As always, the King County Sheriff’s Office will continue to do our part to find innovative ideas to achieve the target cuts. This year, our solutions include the anticipation of 45 revenue backed positions from the COPS Hiring Recovery Program (CHRP) promoted by President Obama. As you are aware, CHRP provides funding directly to law enforcement agencies to hire new and/or rehire career law enforcement officers in an effort to create and preserve jobs, and to increase their community policing capacity and crime-prevention efforts. We anticipate that the County will receive necessary funding for this program. Recognizing the County’s fiscal situation, we only included positions we need to retain in lieu of layoffs should the County not accept these funds.

As I did last year, I am again requesting that internal government service funds be required to create new efficiencies or make position cuts. I remain perplexed why the total charges from these agencies were included as part of my target cut. In fact, of the total \$7 million target cut to KCSO, we are required to pay nearly \$789,000 to other county departments that I do not control and cannot reduce. This amount of funding equates to approximately 7 deputies. I believe it necessary to conduct a systematic zero-based justification of all internal service or support employees and resources before cutting one more dollar of direct services. As I previously noted, this has also been spelled out as your priority in the budget directions given to us by the Executive’s Budget Office.

The most difficult proposal I am submitting is the recommendation to negotiate a reduction in 2010 COLA with the King County Police Officers Guild (KCPOG) from 5% to 2%. The women and men of this department risk their lives every day to protect the public and I believe the nature of their duties deserves special consideration in the living they earn. However, my ultimate

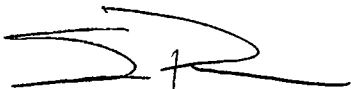
responsibility is to protect the public and if I must make a choice between keeping police on the street versus paying additional wages but having fewer cops, I choose the former. The extreme economic turmoil must require sacrifices by all County employees; especially after the precedent set by you with furloughs of nearly all other King County employees. As the bargaining agent for King County deputies, the Executive is the only one who can negotiate such a reduction - a reduction that would save 12 police officers jobs and keeps them protecting the streets instead of joining the ranks of the unemployed.

We would also like to work collaboratively to develop a more strategic approach to protecting and expanding contract services throughout King County. Remember, contract services for the Sheriff's Office - the third largest revenue source to the general fund. One of my greatest concerns about maintaining our police service contracts is the ability of our contract customers to sustain 5% per year salary growth when their revenues are decreasing significantly. This will certainly lead to further reductions for this bargaining unit in the Sheriff's Office. Please note that police departments across the country, state and even within King County are giving wage concessions in order to preserve jobs. This proposal offers a similar approach. For example the cities of Renton and Kent have implemented such an initiative. I also support the pending council proposal to ask all 14,000 King County employees to make a modest contribution to health care premiums.

I have proposed eliminating \$200,000 for the two detectives dedicated to the Executive's security detail. A threat assessment is under way by my Criminal Investigations Division. It appears that the necessity of this level of personal protection is greatly reduced with a new Executive. Further, it seems inappropriate to maintain this level of staffing when we are reducing staffing for the safety of the 340,000 citizens living in unincorporated King County. My officers remain at your disposal should you, or any County employee, receive threats.

I hope by this letter I have conveyed my deep concerns over the lack of prioritization of target cuts that furthers the continuing degradation of public safety and the criminal justice system. It is with hope that I express my desire to find other ways to fund our vital services to the citizens of this County. I have provided you with some ideas that meet your proposal and highlighted some issues that simply don't make sense. Please do not hesitate to call me to discuss these ideas or additional suggestions of how the County might realign our resources with our priorities and protect vital services to our communities.

Sincerely,



Susan L. Rahr
King County Sheriff

SR:DP:jsk

