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October 23, 2018

CM Rod Dembowski  
Chair of Equity and Justice for All Committee  
King County Council  
516 Third Avenue, Room 1200  
Seattle, WA 98104  
SENT VIA EMAIL TO [Kristina.logsdon@kingcounty.gov](mailto:Kristina.logsdon@kingcounty.gov)

Dear Council Members Dembowski, Gossett, Upthegrove, and Lambert:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at the October 18, 2018 Equity and Justice for All Committee. I spoke on a panel with Mr. Leo Flor and Mr. TJ Cosgrove to offer some suggestions on how the Council can use the upcoming budget process to better connect the direct benefits and services that the County provides to people living in poverty. My recommendations are based in my eleven years of experience delivering direct services as a poverty law attorney at the Seattle Community Law Center, and nine years directing a very small non-profit organization that delivers services for/with the County.

You will notice in my specific recommendations for investment in below that I am requesting that the level of funding that is allocated to Seattle Community Law Center be raised from \$43,000 to \$86,000. This will go a long way in helping our small organization raise salaries to keep quality staff in place.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOUR APPROACH TO THE BUDGET PROCESS**

### **1. Invest in Infrastructure That Results in Stable Relationships for People Living In Poverty**

People living in deep poverty need are in critical need of having continuity in their relationships with caseworkers, social workers, medical providers, legal aid attorneys, and other front-line service delivery employees. Without continuity in these relationships, the clients lose connection, lose trust, and distance themselves from important services.

The infrastructure of the County's delivery system is dependent in part upon doing everything you can to support service providers in retaining excellent employees in their positions. Seattle Community Law Center experienced 66 percent turnover in program staff this year, and we continually witness the same kind of turnover in shelters and human services organizations that our clients engage with. It is critical to retain quality staff that keep strong relationships with poor people if the goal is to connect poor people to the benefits the county provides.

If we do not pay people a decent wage that will keep them in their positions, we will not be as efficient as we would like to be. Housing costs have risen rapidly and not a single nonprofit is keeping up. Retaining quality employees results in:

- Better coordinated service delivery due to retention of institutional knowledge;
- Less resources spent training new people;
- A more diverse workforce of service providers who can afford to take social service jobs; and
- Steady stable staffing that clients can trust.

If the County makes greater investments in services and organizations that are already delivering the benefits that the County has identified as critical, the delivery system will be more efficient and effective.

## **2. Utilize a Race & Equity Lens to Make Budget Decisions about Services and Organizations**

In addition to ensuring trusting and stable relationships for people living in poverty, the system you build to combat poverty will better serve the public when it deploys resources to:

- services and orgs that are consistently taking action to overcome systemic inequities that disproportionately impact people of color;
- organizations that can show they are holding up the mirror and working to understand their own implicit biases and the part they play in perpetuating the racialization of poverty;
- correct any irresponsible gate-keeping that stands in the way of people gaining access to low-barrier services and shelter;
- guarantee well-coordinated and highly communicative services; and
- organizations that deliver services within the communities where poor people live at the request of those communities, rather than expecting poor people to travel to the services in another part of the County.

In support of these factors, I offered a story that illustrates how these measures of success can shape and change the way that organizations and service providers that you work with apply for funding, analyze their own data, deliver services, and ultimately meet the needs of people living in poverty.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the story of our creation of the Mobile Legal Unit, the Justice Bus.

### **SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INVESTMENT**

In response to a question about what services I believe should be supported or eliminated I offered the following:

- **Invest in SCLC and Legal Aid.** I ask that the county invest heavily in civil legal aid, and, in particular, the Seattle Community Law Center. The organizations that make up the Alliance for Equal Justice deliver on the points outlined above. In particular, the

Seattle Community Law Center (SCLC) is a model agency that delivers on all of the points outlined above. I illustrated this to you by presenting on our path to creating Washington's first ever Mobile Legal Unit – the Justice Bus.

- **The General Fund.** SCLC is seeking to have the amount of funds we get from the General Fund raised to \$86,000.
- **VSHSL.** SCLC is a recipient of VSHSL funds for seniors and when it is possible to apply for funds to serve vulnerable populations, we intend to seek a substantial amount of money to help us do an even better job at building relationships with clients that are living in deep poverty so that they may qualify for Social Security benefits and re-enter society.
- **People need to be housed.** Please invest in permanent low-income housing.
- **People need low and no barrier shelter.** Please invest in shelter space.
- **People need transportation.** Make public transportation free for poor people.
- **People need telephones.** In order for people to stay in touch with all of the services made available through county programs they must be able to communicate, voicemail is not enough. Invest in creating a free cell phone program. Absent this, they will need free transportation to get to and communicate with direct service providers.

I welcome the opportunity to speak about any and all of the matters above. Thank you for the opportunity to present this information to the committee. You can reach me at 206-686-7252 x104 or [alex@seattlecommlaw.org](mailto:alex@seattlecommlaw.org).

Sincerely,



Alex KF Doolittle  
Executive Director

cc: CM Larry Gossett  
CM Kathy Lambert  
CM Dave Upthegrove