



Legislation Text

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AN ORDINANCE relating to the adoption of an equity and social justice framework to direct policy development and decision making in King County.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

SECTION 1. Findings:

A. In 1986, the King County council voted to rename King County to honor civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Adopted into state law in 2005, this change serves as a daily reminder to employees and residents of the principles of justice and equality for which Dr. King fought, and our role as a government in carrying forth his vision today.

B. Extensive studies demonstrate vast inequities in the health, wealth and opportunity of residents in King County. A youth of color is six times more likely than a white youth to spend time in a state or county correctional facility; a Native American baby is four times more likely to die before his or her first birthday than a white baby; a worker making between \$15,000 and \$25,000 a year is almost 12 times less likely to have health insurance than one making \$50,000 or more per year; a resident of Auburn, Federal Way or southeast Seattle is five times more likely to die from diabetes than a resident of Mercer Island.

C. Inequities have persistent, profound and long-lasting effects. People with lower incomes, people of color and those in disenfranchised communities are more likely to begin their lives with inadequate infant care, to arrive to school unprepared to learn, to play in unsafe neighborhoods, to receive a lower-quality education, to be less likely to find a good job that pays a livable wage, to be less healthy, to be prone to disease and to die

earlier.

D. The stressors of racism and discrimination also contribute to poor health. A highly-educated, professional African-American woman is more than twice as likely to have a child with very low birth weight, compared to a white woman with a high school diploma or less.

E. During our region's economic ups and downs, some groups are prospering while many poor communities and communities of color are losing ground. From 1970 to 2000, the rate of homeownership declined for African-American families while it remained steady for white families. African American household median income declined from 63% of white household median income in 2000 to 51% in 2007. While many King County communities are thriving, some neighborhoods and communities increasingly exhibit the conditions that lead to poor health, underemployment, poor education, incarceration, loss of opportunity and unsafe living environments.

F. Opportunity is shaped not simply by individual behavior and choices, but rather by the complex interaction of the social, economic and physical environments in which people are born, live and work. Solutions therefore must focus on the root causes of inequities, the size, scope and complexity of which demand comprehensive approaches across sectors, jurisdictions and communities.

G. King County must build on a rich tradition of local activities to address disparities. Just some of the examples include the Children's Health Initiative, the Black on Black Crime Coalition, the King County Work Training Program, and HealthScape.

H. Two national initiatives, both sponsored by the Health Policy Institute of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, provide further support for the development of King County's initiative. The Dellums Commission analyzed policies that negatively effect the life outcomes of young men of color and their communities, with an eye on creating an action plan to improve these policies. Place Matters convenes teams from jurisdictions across the country to identify the underlying causes of health inequities and create strategies that improve physical, social and economic environments for all. Participation in these national efforts spurred

Executive Ron Sims and his staff to ask what King County could do to address inequities locally and to take action.

I. At the launch of the King County Equity and Social Justice Initiative in February 2008, executive Sims and the King County council sponsored two town halls to begin a dialogue on equity and social justice in the region. To continue these dialogues, a community engagement team developed a curriculum and trained county staff and community members to facilitate discussions among over 100 community groups and organizations in 2008 and 2009.

J. In the Initiative's first year, every executive department made strides towards achieving equity through department commitments. These included, but were not limited to, public health creating a new translation policy, the department of natural resources and parks mapping parks and trail services by race, ethnicity and income, and the department of development and environmental services beginning the process of rewriting the zoning code to encourage vibrant, mixed-use communities, with two demonstration project neighborhoods. Executive departments have reported back on their progress, renewed previous commitments, and added new commitments in 2009.

K. An inter-departmental team, facilitated by the Seattle-King County department of public health, was formed in 2008, with representatives from executive departments to develop and coordinate the work of the Initiative across departments. In 2009, this team made a commitment to create a learning community and expanded to include more branches of King County government, with the hope of becoming a county-wide leadership team.

L. An Equity Impact Review Tool was developed and used by departments, providing work teams with a structured way to consider which communities benefit and are burdened by policies and decisions. This tool helped the Health Reform Initiative enhance a strategy to assist a greater number of employees to move beyond "bronze" to achieve "silver" and "gold" health care coverage. This tool is also a model that is being adapted by many jurisdictions across the country.

M. King County has approached its first year of work with openness to learning. Recognizing that there is no blueprint for achieving equity and social justice, the initiative supports genuine inquiry, reflection and opportunities for learning among policy-makers, employees, community members and partners.

N. King County acknowledges the vision and leadership of executive Sims in launching the Equity and Social Justice Initiative. Achieving equity and social justice in King County requires sustained, long-term, county-wide partnership and action.

SECTION 2. Definitions.

A. “Equity” is all people having an equal opportunity to attain their full potential.

B. “Inequity” refers to differences in well-being between and within communities that are systematic, patterned, unfair, and can be changed. They are not random, as they are caused by our past and current decisions, systems of power and privilege, policies and the implementation of those policies.

C. “Social justice” refers to all aspects of justice, including social, legal, political and economic. It demands fair distribution of public goods, institutional resources and life opportunities.

D. “Social determinants” of health and equity are the social, economic and physical environment conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and which both directly and indirectly affect their health and well-being. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of wealth, power and resources at global, national and local levels, which are themselves influenced by policy choices at those same levels.

E. “Communities” are groups of people who share some or all of the following: geographic boundaries, sense of membership, culture, language, common norms and interests.

SECTION 3. Vision, Mission and Purpose.

A. The vision and mission of the Equity and Social Justice Initiative will be:

1. Vision: Martin Luther King, Jr. County is a place of opportunity, fairness, equity and social justice where all people thrive.

2. Mission: Martin Luther King, Jr. County government listens to, works with, and respects the

diversity of perspectives in communities to build partnerships, develop policies and deliver services that create conditions for all people to reach their full potential.

B. King County adopts the following equity and social justice principles:

1. Develop a learning culture that supports equity;
2. Look beyond individual behaviors to the social, economic and physical factors in communities that shape behaviors;
3. Actively seek out and promote decisions and policies aimed at equity;
4. Work across departments;
5. Work side-by-side with external partners;
6. Enable historically marginalized communities to influence decisions and spur action;
7. Recognize and honor cultural differences.

C. King County's equity work will be focused on those social, economic and physical environment factors which are the root causes of inequities, also termed the social determinants of health and equity. These factors include:

1. family wage jobs/job training;
2. community economic development;
3. affordable, quality, healthy housing;
4. quality early childhood development;
5. quality education;
6. healthy physical environment;
7. community and public safety;
8. neighborhood social cohesion;
9. access to all modes of safe and efficient transportation;
10. access to affordable food systems and affordable and healthy foods;
11. access to parks and nature;

12. access to affordable and culturally appropriate health and human services;

13. racial equity in organizational practices, through policies that promote equity and the removal of historic/traditional organizational barriers. Racial equity is not intended to mean preferential treatment based on race in public employment or public contracting.

SECTION 4. Equity and Social Justice Initiative activities

A. Learning Organization: King County will approach its work on equity and social justice as a learning organization. King County will therefore incorporate many voices and perspectives into the work of the Initiative, create opportunities for reflection and evaluation, will take risks and try new ideas to further equity and social justice in King County. King County shall continue reporting and evaluating performance as these strategies are implemented, and will incorporate learning into new approaches for achieving equity and social justice.

B. Strategic Plan: The executive shall present an equity and social justice strategic plan to the Council by June 2010. The strategic plan will:

1. be a subset of and align with the county-wide strategic plan;
2. inform and align with department strategic plans;
3. include a logic model articulating King County's approach;
4. encompass all Executive agencies of King County government;
5. include a resource and organization plan;
6. include measures, targets and a plan for performance management;
7. be reviewed and updated to incorporate new learning; and

8. from June-December 2010, the executive will collaborate with the council and separately elected officials to develop strategies that cut across all branches of King County government. A final version of the county-wide equity and social justice strategic plan will be presented to the council by January 2011.

C. Program Components: King County's work on equity and social justice will include the following

activities to address the root causes of inequities in King County:

1. King County will apply an equity lens to policy-making and the delivery of services. This will include the following actions:
 - a. Executive departments will make annual commitments to equity-promoting activities related to the social determinants of health and equity. During the development of the equity and social justice strategic plan, other branches and agencies will be invited to also make annual commitments.
 - b. Each commitment will include performance targets, a plan for tracking progress and opportunities for mid-course correction and learning.
 - c. Performance reports will include an analysis of how departments and agencies fulfilled these commitments.
 - d. These commitments, and progress made towards meeting them, will be reported in an annual review of county actions taken to address inequities.
 - e. The equity impact review tool and other formal tools that assist employees and policy makers in evaluating the impact of a policy or program decision on different racial and economic groups will be used at least twice by every executive department by the end of 2010.
 - f. In addition to the tools, the equity and social justice team will create a data and information resource, accessible to all employees, which will be used to help determine which communities will be affected by policies and programs. The data and information resource will be made available to the public, so community partners can make informed decisions about their own programs and policies as they relate to equity and social justice. The data and information resource will be developed in 2010 and 2011 and released to the public based on 2010 census availability.
 - g. The human resources division, in collaboration with the equity and social justice team will develop trainings and education materials for employees about the social determinants of health and equity as well as racism, power and privilege and their relationship to county practices and decision-making.

h. By March 2010, the equity and social justice team, in collaboration with the Office of Management and Budget, and the Council's budget committee, will design and implement an equity review process for budget development and decision making.

2. King County will engage and partner with communities. This will include, but not be limited to:

a. subcommittee of the Equity and Social Justice Team will be responsible for continuing to develop opportunities for community dialogues on equity and social justice.

b. The county will reach out to the communities it serves in more varied and effective ways over time. By June 2010, the Equity and Social Justice Team will create of a framework for community engagement in policy development and the delivery of service, around which training and accountability tools will be developed.

c. The Equity and Social Justice Team will convene an equity roundtable of community partners and stakeholders to advise the county on specific equity-related projects by June 2010.

SECTION 5. Organization.

A. The executive will appoint a high level county official to assure the implementation of the Equity and Social Justice Initiative.

B. The executive branch will convene a county-wide Equity and Social Justice

Team to coordinate the development and implementation of the equity and social justice strategic plan.