



Legislation Text

File #: 2022-0229, **Version:** 2

A MOTION requesting the executive develop an implementation plan to establish a personal locator beacon lending program.

WHEREAS, a personal locator beacon ("PLB") is a small portable device that transmits a personalized distress signal in the 406 MHz spectrum range to a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ("NOAA")-operated fleet of geostationary satellites ("COSPAS-SARSAT") which, for the mainland United States, routes the signal to the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center, which in turn alerts the relevant search and rescue jurisdiction. For King County, the alert is sent to the state of Washington Search and Rescue coordinator and is then sent to the King County sheriff's office, and

WHEREAS, all PLBs are required by federal law to be registered with NOAA with a name, address, phone number and any pertinent information such as medical problems, and this information is sent to search and rescue personnel along with the GPS location, and

WHEREAS, NOAA credits COSPAS-SARSAT, which transmit emergency beacons including PLB signals, from saving three hundred thirty lives in 2021, and

WHEREAS, in partnership with the sheriff's office, King County Search and Rescue conducts over two hundred missions annually, which include numerous backcountry rescues, and

WHEREAS, the King County department of natural resources and parks, parks division, manages thirty-two thousand acres of open space and two hundred fifty miles of backcountry trails with year-round accessibility for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding, and

WHEREAS, the National Park Service recommends taking a PLB when going into the backcountry or wilderness area where mobile phone coverage is limited, and

WHEREAS, the Washington Trails Association states that PLBs have saved many lives and should be strongly considered by all backcountry travelers, and

WHEREAS, the Washington state Parks and Recreation Commission also recommends carrying a PLB while paddleboarding and boating, and

WHEREAS, as of June 2022, the retail price for a PLB ranged from one hundred dollars to six hundred dollars, making the purchase unaffordable to many lower income individuals and thereby increasing disparate safety outcomes depending on income level, and

WHEREAS, the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Alaska established a free PLB program to provide service members and civil-service employees the ability to check out a PLB to enhance safety while enjoying the outdoors, and

WHEREAS, the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service in Australia also lends PLBs for free at its visitor centers and police stations;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The council requests that the executive develop an implementation plan to establish a personal locator beacon ("PLB") lending program. The program shall lend PLBs at no cost or low cost to King County residents or visitors to King County Parks, or both. The implementation plan should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. An estimate of the costs to implement the program, including funding source options;
2. Consideration of whether establishing partnerships with private entities such as Recreational Equipment, Inc., and nonprofit entities such as the Washington Trails Association and King County Search and Rescue to support the program is advisable;
3. Strategies to ensure the program is publicized widely throughout the county to bring awareness of the program and throughout the state to encourage other local jurisdictions to follow suit;
4. A plan to educate program participants to ensure they continue to plan and prepare and exercise

safety practices and rely on PLBs as last resort;

5. Considerations to expand the scope of the program to include paddleboarders, boaters, snow skiers and others who participate in recreational water and snow activities; and

6. A project plan to enable launch of the program in 2023.

B. The executive should electronically file the implementation plan no later than May 31, 2023, with the clerk of the council, who shall retain an electronic copy and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers, the council chief of staff and the lead staff for the transportation, economy and environment committee, or its successor.

C. The council requests that the executive include an appropriation in the 2023-2024 Proposed Biennial Budget to enable launch of the PLB lending program in 2023.