



# KING COUNTY

1200 King County Courthouse  
516 Third Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98104

## Signature Report

### Ordinance 19116

**Proposed No.** 2019-0236.2

**Sponsors** Zahilay, Kohl-Welles, Dembowski,  
McDermott and Balducci

1 AN ORDINANCE proposing an amendment to the King  
 2 County Charter to clarify when an inquest will be held and  
 3 to require the county to assign an attorney to represent the  
 4 family of the decedent in the inquest proceeding; amending  
 5 Section 895 of the King County Charter; and submitting the  
 6 same to the qualified voters of the county for their  
 7 ratification or rejection at the next general election  
 8 occurring more than forty-five days after the enactment of  
 9 this ordinance.

10 BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

11 **SECTION 1. Findings:**

12 A. The inquest process serves the public function of fact finding related to a  
 13 death and involves formal legal proceedings, discovery and examination of persons,  
 14 including law enforcement personnel and expert witnesses.

15 B. There is a public benefit in providing publicly financed legal counsel to  
 16 families of the decedents wishing to fully participate in the inquest process. The inquest  
 17 process is a proceeding involving introduction of evidence and examining of witnesses,  
 18 including law enforcement personnel and experts. Publicly financed legal counsel will  
 19 allow all families to fully and equitably participate in the inquest process regardless of

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20 financial means. Inquests serve a public function of determining the cause and  
21 circumstances of any death involving a member of a law enforcement agency in the  
22 performance of the member's duties. The findings of an inquest help the public, family  
23 members of decedents and policy makers understand the causes and circumstances of the  
24 decedent's death. Public financing of legal counsel for all families of decedents will  
25 better ensure each party to an inquest will have equal opportunity to participate.  
26 Increasing such participation will bolster the transparency of the inquest process, thus  
27 furthering the recognized public function of an inquest.

28 SECTION 2. There shall be submitted to the voters of King County for their`  
29 ratification or rejection, at the next general election to be held in this county occurring  
30 more than forty-five days after the enactment of this ordinance, an amendment to Section  
31 895 of the King County Charter to read as follows:

32 **895. Mandatory Inquests.**

33 An inquest shall be held to investigate the causes and circumstances of any death  
34 ~~((involving a member of the law enforcement agency of the county in the performance of~~  
35 ~~the member's duties)) where an action, decision or possible failure to offer the  
36 appropriate care by a member of any law enforcement agency might have contributed to  
37 an individual's death. For the purposes of this section, "member of any law enforcement  
38 agency" includes a commissioned officer, noncommissioned staff and agent of any local  
39 or state police force, jail, detention facility or corrections agency. The county shall  
40 assign an attorney to represent the family of the decedent in the inquest proceeding, but  
41 the family has the option of accepting the attorney or not.~~

42 SECTION 3. The clerk of the council shall certify the proposition to the county

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43 elections director, in substantially the following form, with such additions, deletions or  
44 modifications as may be required by the prosecuting attorney:

45       Shall Section 895 of the King County Charter be amended to clarify that  
46       inquests are required where an action, decision or possible failure to offer  
47       the appropriate care by a member of any law enforcement agency might

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48            have contributed to an individual's death and to provide an attorney at the  
49            county's expense to represent the decedent's family in the inquest?  
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Ordinance 19116 was introduced on 1/28/2020 and passed by the Metropolitan King County Council on 6/23/2020, by the following vote:

Yes: 8 - Ms. Balducci, Mr. Dembowski, Ms. Kohl-Welles, Ms. Lambert, Mr. McDermott, Mr. Upthegrove, Mr. von Reichbauer and Mr. Zahilay  
No: 1 - Mr. Dunn

KING COUNTY COUNCIL  
KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON

DocuSigned by:  
*Claudia Balducci*  
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Claudia Balducci, Chair

ATTEST:

DocuSigned by:  
*Melani Pedroza*  
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Melani Pedroza, Clerk of the Council

APPROVED this 8 day of July, 2020.  
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DocuSigned by:  
*Dow Constantine*  
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Dow Constantine, County Executive

**Attachments:** None