

**Executive Girmay Zahilay**

Chinook Building, CNK-EX-0800
401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 800
Seattle, WA 98104-2391

May 18, 2026

The Honorable Sarah Perry
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
COURTHOUSE

Dear Chair Perry and Councilmembers,

I write regarding my sewer rate and capacity charge recommendation for 2027 in proposed Ordinance 2026-0103, and in response to a recent letter from the City of Seattle. I intend to offer responses to other rate comment letters in the coming weeks, as well.

My commitment to improving affordability for ratepaying households is strong. There is much we can do working with cities, sewer districts, regulators and others to create a sustainable rate path. However, I must express deep concern with the City of Seattle's call for a 2027 rate that is substantially lower than we need, and I want the Council to have the information it needs regarding potential consequences of adopting an insufficient rate.

I did not recommend a 12.75% rate increase lightly. Adopting a rate two percent lower than recommended would offer minimal, short-term rate reduction while increasing risks to communities, the environment, King County's legal standing and possibly our utility bond ratings. Because the Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) must prioritize projects tied to legally binding requirements, deficient funding for 2027 would require WTD to delay upgrades to aging infrastructure. This would endanger reliability, force higher costs on future generations, and increase the chance of disruptions to service and impacts to public health and the environment.

I want to be clear that the single largest driver of proposed rate increases is a regulatory requirement to build facilities in the City of Seattle to reduce combined sewer overflows, which arise because of Seattle's combined sewer system. For years, some jurisdictions have raised the possibility of Seattle taking on a larger share of these costs, which would

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have an immediate and significant impact on reducing the rate for other cities and sewer districts. As we move forward, this should be part of the larger regional discussion of sewer rates that is currently playing out as we continue our work on the Regional Wastewater Services Plan.

King County staff are pursuing multiple efforts to develop a more sustainable, affordable rate path, and we are working hard to contain costs in a rapidly changing environment. WTD implements robust capital planning processes, employing a rigorous portfolio management process for capital projects. In addition to our prioritization and governance structure, WTD utilizes a data-informed schedule risk adjustment factor in rate setting to right-size our forecasted spending and sewer rate proposal. This ensures annual rate increases are carefully constrained to what is necessary and can realistically be accomplished for the coming year. WTD is also collaborating with an independent review by a third-party consultant overseen by the King County's legislative branch to identify further improvements to capital planning and delivery programs.

For decades, King County has worked alongside local cities, sewer districts, Tribes, and regulators to protect Puget Sound and provide essential infrastructure for our communities and economy. We cannot, on our watch, endanger our frontline workers or community members by failing to replace aging infrastructure. We cannot fall short in providing enough capacity for our growing region. We cannot disregard federal and state regulations, a federal consent decree, or other legal commitments without adding to risk and consequence. The 12.75% rate proposal allows King County to honor our immediate and ongoing commitments while we make strong efforts toward a more sustainable long-term financial path. The 10.75% (or lower) recommendation does not.

I am grateful to serve alongside the County Council to honor our commitment to our workers, our communities, and to a healthy Puget Sound. I look forward to working together to chart a path toward sustainable rates for local households. Thank you for your consideration.

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Sincerely,



Girmay Zahilay

King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Stephanie Cirkovich, Chief of Staff, King County Council

Melani Hay, Clerk of the Council

Karan Gill, Deputy Executive, Office of the Executive

Jasmin Weaver, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive

Hyeok Kim, Chief Operating Officer, Office of the Executive

Sierra Howlett Browne, Director of Government Relations, Office of the Executive

Garrett Holbrook, Council Relations Manager, Office of the Executive

Mo McBroom, Interim Director, King County Department of Natural Resources and
Parks

Kamuron Gurol, Director, King County Wastewater Treatment Division

Andrew Lee, CEO/General Manager, Seattle Public Utilities

Katie Wilson, Mayor, City of Seattle

Joy Hollingsworth, Council President, Seattle City Council

Eddie Lin, Councilmember, Seattle City Council

Alexis Mercedes Rinck, Councilmember, Seattle City Council

Maritza Rivera, Councilmember, Seattle City Council

Rob Saka, Councilmember, Seattle City Council

Dan Strauss, Councilmember, Seattle City Council

Dionne Foster, Councilmember, Seattle City Council