



Douglas KCCG Mtg
10-10-07

KING COUNTY CORRECTIONS GUILD

**Statement by Doug Justus, President, KCCG, Regional Policies
Committee Meeting. October 10, 2007**

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important subject. We are at a crossroads regarding jail planning, and I believe the future of our corrections system is the most important regional issue this committee could consider.

For many decades the King County jail system has performed several vital missions:

- We have housed all felons, and all those arrested in unincorporated King County.
- We have housed most misdemeanants arrested in most of our cities
- And we have played a vital role in the proper functioning of the state's corrections system by incarcerating those who violate their probationary early release.

Today, there is not enough King County jail capacity to perform those missions. The state is often in the position of sending prisoners outside of King County, and if the city prisoners were returned from Yakima, our jails would be over capacity **today**. Even if the current policies are continued, according to the administration, King County will need more jail capacity in **eight years**. We need to begin the process to expand capacity today.

Those of us who work in our corrections system see the effects of this capacity crunch every day:

- Our current system is chaotic and inefficient, with prisoners constantly being shuttled between Kent, Seattle, and Yakima. Jails need to be in close proximity to King County courts, thus it makes no sense to ship prisoners over the mountains, or force the cities to build their own jails, spread around the county.

- The state needs local jail beds and treatment programs for its system of Community Corrections to succeed.
- Studies show that sending prisoners to other communities for detention weakens their support systems and increases recidivism rates.
- Finally, we believe our capacity shortage is leading to a degradation of public safety by including inappropriate offenders in community corrections programs. We support community corrections, but only as an option for those charged with non-violent offenses.

Clearly, more jail capacity is needed in King County. The question is, who will build and operate it? We strongly believe that in the interest of efficiency and preserving a regional justice system, King County should remain the county's primary provider of secure detention.

Voters, by the way, share that opinion. We recently commissioned a poll of King County voters, and by a margin of 53% to 28% voters believe King County, not the individual cities, should operate any new jails.

Unfortunately, we believe that we are on the verge of seeing the regional system break up. King County's past policy decisions have understandably spurred some cities to consider building their own capacity. We are told by some key cities that irreversible decisions may be only ***weeks away***.

We urge the County Executive, the County Council, and the cities to begin serious discussions immediately on preserving our regional system and expanding King County jail capacity.

We understand that we bare major responsibility for making our corrections system work. We stand ready to work with you on the labor details of any new capacity, and to advocate with you to the public for the resources necessary to build that capacity.

Thank you again for this opportunity, and I look forward to your questions.