



King County

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King County Executive

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January 31, 2024

The Honorable Dave Upthegrove
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Upthegrove:

As called for by Ordinance 19546, I am pleased to transmit *Care and Closure: Final Strategic Planning Report on the Future of Secure Juvenile Detention*. This report details the effort to increase public safety and improve outcomes for youth by creating and expanding community-based alternatives to traditional youth detention, and ultimately repurposing the current youth detention space at the Judge Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center (CCFJC). Also included is a proposed Motion that, if passed, would acknowledge receipt of the report.

In mid-2020, I proposed that the County continue on its successful course of reducing youth involvement with the criminal legal system and tackling racially disproportionate detention born of generations of systemic racism embedded inside and outside of the system. By breaking harmful cycles of crime and incarceration, and implementing new models to bring about real change, we would strive to cycle out of the use of traditional youth detention no later than 2025.

Since then, it has been our collective work – across our government and with impacted youth, families, and trusted community-based organizations – to create a new vision for youth accountability and healing, and to forge true community safety consistent with our values. The question for us is not *whether* we need to do better. The question is *how* to do better.

The enclosed report updates King County's current and planned work on this project outlined in three previous reports submitted to Council on August 4, 2023, June 30, 2022, and September 30, 2021. Led by the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) at my request, we continued to convene the Advisory Committee, a group of community partners, systems partners, and impacted community members, to guide the project and co-create recommendations informed by community input.

Informed by input from impacted community members and research on promising practices, the Advisory Committee and subcommittees developed six recommendations, highlighted below. Three recommendations received strong support from the Advisory Committee (#3, #5, and #6); one received general support (#4); and the committee did not form a consensus on two of the recommendations (#1 and #2). Further deliberation is needed on how the community-based system that recommendations 1 and 2 outline can maintain safety of the youth and for the community, all while improving upon the shortcomings of current youth detention approaches.

Each Advisory Committee recommendation detailed in the enclosed report includes a high-level description, an accounting of support or lack of support within the Advisory Committee, questions to guide future work, and examples of other jurisdictions with similar models. The Advisory Committee recommends that King County:

1. Create, operate, and maintain a 24/7 respite and receiving center where law enforcement will take all youth under 18 years old upon arrest unless they can be released upon entering the center.
2. Provide very short-term respite housing at the respite and receiving center for youth who cannot go home due to safety reasons.
3. Provide enhanced immediate supports when youth return home to their families or are placed in kinship care with extended family members.
4. Create, contract, and provide oversight to a network of diverse community care homes where youth would stay while their court case proceeds if they are unable to go home because of safety concerns.
5. Strengthen community infrastructure and capacity to ensure all youth have access to and can benefit from culturally responsive and linguistically relevant, developmentally appropriate, and youth- and family-centered supports that address their identified needs, regardless of whether they are at home, with a relative, or at a community care home.
6. Ensure the next steps for these recommendations are informed by and centered on input, expertise, and ideas of the community members most directly impacted by the youth legal system.

Just as this initiative has reinforced the importance of Care and Closure's goals, it has also revealed the complexity of bringing forth a new system that works better. Creating the new system will require participation, deliberation, agreement, and support from the Council and Superior Court. State-level statutory and/or regulatory changes may also be necessary.

The Advisory Committee also identified accomplishing this significant transformation and closing the youth detention center will require more time to allow for the finalization, resourcing, and implementation of these recommendations, which are not feasible to complete by 2025. The next phase of planning and implementation described in the report is anticipated to take until at least 2028 for the first components of the new system to be funded, implemented, and begin operations. While we continue to work together to create a better system for community and youth and recognize that this work will continue beyond 2025, we must embrace both the urgency of doing better and the importance of doing this work well.

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The report updates the key findings from the County's engagement with impacted community members, including youth in detention, on electronic home monitoring, and in the community; parents and family members; harmed community members; and community organizations serving youth with experience in the youth legal system. Throughout the project, the County has heard from nearly 1,800 impacted community members who overwhelmingly believe King County needs expanded community-based responses to intervene when youth cause serious harm in their communities. They desire less reliance on secure youth detention, enhanced supports for youth and harmed community partners, and community-centered responses to when youth experience crises and cause harm in their communities.

Lastly, the report highlights six anticipated actions for the next phase of the project. Determining the future of secure juvenile detention at the CCFJC requires ongoing, robust, and authentic community engagement that centers young people and families with lived experience in the criminal legal system and harmed community members.

Ultimately, expanding community-based alternatives focused on care, accountability, and safety will take collective action throughout King County to achieve the very best outcomes for our young people. Nearly four years ago, I proposed a new course forward so we could move beyond an existing system that must be unbroken from its racial disparities.

The focus on *closing* the existing facility sparked urgency and awareness to begin the Care and Closure initiative. Delivering on the initiative's promise now requires diligent work to *open* a system of youth healing and accountability and community safety that allows every King County resident to thrive.

All of us know that the path ahead is challenging, but the urgency with which we must deliver on the promise to transform a broken system cannot be clearer. The work of the Advisory Committee outlines the path forward, and together, we can create healthier and safer communities for everyone.

If your staff have any questions, please contact Leo Flor, Director, Department of Community and Human Services at 206-477-4384.

Sincerely,



Dow Constantine
King County Executive

Enclosure

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cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Stephanie Cirkovich, Chief of Staff

Melani Hay, Clerk of the Council

Shannon Braddock, Deputy King County Executive, Office of the Executive

Karan Gill, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive

Penny Lipsou, Council Relations Director, Office of the Executive

Leo Flor, Director, Department of Community and Human Services