



# RECOMMENDATIONS ON HIRING A NEW SHERIFF & IMPROVING PUBLIC SAFETY

Prepared for the

King County Executive  
and  
King County Council

by the

**PUBLIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

September 30, 2021

*EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:***A SAFER, MORE CONNECTED COMMUNITY FOR EVERYONE**

The Public Safety Advisory Committee is grateful to the County Council and Executive for the opportunity to speak on behalf of King County's many diverse communities. We hope that the Core Values, Priority Outcomes, Recruitment Process Recommendations, and future role for a Public Safety Advisory Committee presented here will help a new Sheriff and Sheriff's Office build a safer and more connected community for everyone. The future King County Sheriff's Office should approach public safety as a partnership grounded in community relationships. Sheriff's Deputies should be seen — and see themselves — as integral members of the communities they serve. In this way, everyone can recognize that we are all working together to make sure that each one of us is cared for in our community and that we all get home safely.

The Committee worked hard on each statement in this report and reached consensus throughout. The group feels especially strongly about the following:

- *Racism* embedded within the county as a whole has perpetuated a systemic failure to the community, to law enforcement and others.
- The title of "**Sheriff**" and agency name of "**King County Sheriff's Office**" should remain. This acknowledges that public safety is a countywide responsibility that goes beyond one person or agency. It is also consistent with the past and avoids distraction over semantics.
- The County must improve public safety by providing for people's basic needs and must approach this work with a focus on **race and social equity**.
- While the Sheriff's Office must take responsibility for its own actions and inactions, King County as a whole must also work with the community to **heal the wounds** it has caused.
- Core values of and priority outcomes for the new Sheriff and Sheriff's Office should be led by **shared leadership, racial equity, healing, equitable outcomes, and collaboration**.
- The new sheriff should have both a **law enforcement background** and a track record of making decisions with the **community as a focus**. They should exhibit strong **leadership and commitment to lasting change** and have a history of **collaboration and partnerships**.
- The **Public Safety Advisory Committee** and **Office of Law Enforcement Oversight** should have an active role in **reviewing candidates and selecting finalists**. **BIPOC communities and contract agencies** should also have an opportunity to **interview finalists**, while the **public** must have **meaningful input** into the selection process.
- The Public Safety Advisory Committee should evolve into a **deliberate and ongoing partnership** to advise and monitor progress toward this vision and communicate that progress.

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**PROCESS & TIMEFRAME**

In November 2020, King County voters passed Charter Amendments 5 and 6, which changed the King County Sheriff from an elected to an appointed position for the first time in twenty years. Charter Amendment 5 makes the Sheriff an appointed position instead of an elected position, appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. This is effective Jan. 1, 2022, at the end of the current elected term for the King County Sheriff. Charter Amendment 6 empowers the County Council to set the KCSO duties by ordinance.

In March 2021, the King County Council adopted ordinance 19249, subsequently amended by Ordinance 19313 in July 2021. These actions established a public safety advisory committee to “engage with and receive input from community stakeholders directly impacted by the department of public safety and provide guidance to the council and the executive in the selection, appointment and confirmation process for appointment of the chief officer of the department of public safety” and on “how law enforcement services should be provided and ways the county could improve the delivery of law enforcement services to preserve and enhance public safety.”

The initial ordinance required this input and guidance by July 1, 2021, a deadline that was later extended to September 30, 2021.

The King County Executive and Council appointed the 13-member Public Safety Advisory Committee in March. A first meeting was held on April 1, with County staff facilitating. A facilitation team was hired in early April, and the first meeting with the facilitators was held on April 22.

The individuals appointed to the Public Safety Advisory Committee came to the task from very different perspectives on public safety and law enforcement. This diversity of life experience and world view is a great strength, but also required considerable time and effort to find common purpose. As such, the 161 days from April 22 to September 30 was a very



compressed timeframe for the committee to build a foundation of acceptance and trust of each other and the assignment; to co-create a process; to educate itself on the many duties of the King County Sheriff's Office; to hear from diverse voices on the community's experiences with law enforcement and law enforcement oversight; to craft consensus recommendations on the committee's assigned tasks; and to gain community feedback on those draft recommendations. This compressed timeframe — complicated by the limitations on in-person meetings during COVID-19 — was a considerable challenge.

The Committee overcame these challenges through significant hard work and determination. The full Committee met a total of 21 times through eighteen videoconferences and three in-person meetings. Committee members also met informally in smaller groups and with constituents throughout the process. In the end, the Committee came to consensus around the recommendations in this report. Nevertheless, many on the Committee would have preferred a longer timeframe that would have allowed a more thorough process of community engagement, as well as more detailed recommendations.



## CONTEXT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT

*King County acknowledges that since its origins, the practice of law enforcement in the United States and in King County includes a history of immeasurable harms to segments of its most vulnerable communities. These harms include the incomparable loss of life experienced across communities, a deep sense of mistrust in law enforcement and other disproportionate impacts in policing, in violence, and in policy. Throughout history, racially disparate outcomes demonstrate that the brunt of these harms have, and continue to, unduly impact individuals, families, and futures of Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.*

*In addressing each of these issues, the PSAC wants to communicate clearly that racism embedded within the county as a whole has perpetuated a systemic failure to the community, to law enforcement and others. This failure comes from misaligned policy decisions, lack of appropriate resources, disconnected programs, and the inordinate expectations placed on law enforcement officers to be the sole providers of public safety. While it is time for King County Sheriff's Office to take responsibility for its own actions and inactions, the most meaningful change will take place once the County as a whole invests in improving public safety beyond the role of policing and commits to working with the entire community to heal the wounds it has caused.*

*The Public Safety Advisory Committee discussed many duties that might better be carried out by some agency other than the King County Sheriff's Office, but many of these duties are placed on the Sheriff's Office by state law. Changing these requirements is beyond the County's control and will require a lobbying effort to change those state laws. Additionally, many expectations get placed on the Sheriff's Office without adequate resources to meet those expectations.*

***Racism** embedded within the county as a whole has perpetuated a systemic failure to the community, to law enforcement and others.*

*The most meaningful changes will happen when King County as a whole invests in improving **public safety beyond policing** and commits to working with the entire community to **heal the wounds** it has caused.*

## **AGENCY NAME**

*King County Charter Amendment #6, refers to “the duties of the chief officer of the department of public safety, who may also be referred to as the county sheriff, and the duties and structure of the department of public safety ...”*

*The Public Safety Advisory Committee notes that the King County Sheriff’s Office is just one piece of a complex public safety system and has a limited span of control. For consistency with the past, to avoid distraction over semantics, and to acknowledge the finite role of this department, the Public Safety Advisory Committee recommends that the chief officer continue to be called “sheriff” and the public safety department continue to be called “King County Sheriff’s Office.”*

*The chief law enforcement officer should continue to be called “**sheriff**” and the public safety department continue to be called “**King County Sheriff’s Office.**”*

## **RACIAL EQUITY FOCUS**

*In making these recommendations, the Public Safety Advisory Committee stresses that this work is not done. We as a county must approach public safety with a commitment to focus on race and social equity. This approach requires allowing for time to develop relationships and authentic participation by impacted communities. This will establish cultural humility and produce effective strategies, policies, and procedures. A Racial Equity Toolkit should be used to clarify who is helped and who is harmed by proposals and to strengthen support for community-led changes through authentic community connections.*

*As a county, we must approach public safety with a commitment to **race and social equity.***

## CORE VALUES

Core values are **the fundamental beliefs of a person or organization**. These guiding principles dictate behavior and can help people understand the difference between right and wrong. Core values also help organizations to determine if they are on the right path by creating an unwavering guide. The Public Safety Advisory Committee recommends the following Core Values for the King County Sheriff's Office and its new Sheriff:

- **Shared Leadership:** The Sheriff's Office knows that it does not stand alone and that the many departments of the larger public safety system must work together toward community wellbeing.
- **Racial Equity.** The Sheriff's Office is committed to eliminating racially disparate outcomes. This means persistently striving for evidence-based, unbiased, fair, and responsible policing. This also means advancing equity in personnel recruitment and advancement, as well as in community service and wellbeing. The personnel of the Sheriff's Office and the impacts of their work mirror the makeup and meet the expectations of the communities they serve.
- **Healing:** King County acknowledges a history of harms between its sheriff's officers and members of the community and actively works to heal these wounds. The Sheriff's Office publicly acknowledges and takes responsibility for wrongdoing and seeks to end it.
- **Wellness:** The Sheriff and Sheriff's Office promote, encourage, and honor the wellness of its personnel and the rest of the community.
- **Community-centered.** The Sheriff and the Sheriff's Office see themselves as part of the community and work to learn with, serve and co-create with diverse community members to build trust and support.
- **Local Control.** Neighborhoods, contract cities, tribes and transit agencies have a say in how their communities are policed.
- **Supportive Work Environment.** The King County Sheriff's Office is committed to its personnel, as evidenced by a reasonable workload, appropriate scope of work, and effective, adequate, and ongoing training.
- **Oversight.** The Sheriff's Office works with the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight toward continuous improvement practices that prevent loss of life. This includes collective bargaining, as well as Executive and Council policy-setting.
- **Service.** The King County Sheriff's Office exists to serve its diverse communities.
- **Empathy:** The new Sheriff is visibly compassionate and understanding, acknowledging past harms, and promoting a vision of mutual respect and support.
- **Inspiration:** The new Sheriff is forward thinking, committed to making change, and inspiring innovation, creativity, and healing.
- **Integrity.** The Sheriff and Sheriff's Office are committed to transparency and honesty in all their work.
- **Engaged:** The Sheriff and Sheriff's Office are visible and accessible to the community. The Sheriff is also visible and accessible to department personnel.
- **Leadership & Communication.** The new Sheriff is an effective leader with exceptional communication skills both inside the agency and with the community.
- **Effective & Data-Driven.** The new Sheriff is committed to on-going evaluation of their work and continuous improvement in critical service areas such as service delivery, response times, use of force, proportionality in traffic stops and other law enforcement actions. The Sheriff leads an Office that embraces creativity and innovation, employing adaptive strategies based on community-informed, data-informed, and evidence-based solutions. The County uses data to guide funding toward effective prevention strategies to keep people out of the criminal legal system.



## **PRIORITY OUTCOMES**

*The residents of King County should expect the following priority outcomes from its future Sheriff's Office, and King County can improve the delivery of police services to preserve and enhance public safety in the following ways:*

- **Equitable Outcomes.** Communities of Color do not disproportionately account for stops, citations, arrests, and bookings.
- **Healing & Relationships.** The Sheriff's Office acknowledges previous harm our systems have caused community. It takes action to build healthy and sustained relationships with community, creating leadership for change toward unity and racial equity.
- **Community Safety.** As a result of collaborations with community partners, services delivered by the Sheriff's Office in collaboration with community partners, King County is safer for everyone, both in perception and reality.
- **Use of Force.** Police use of force incidents are reduced in accordance with state law and to a standard that demonstrates that use of force is only used as a last resort.
- **Collaboration.** The Sheriff's Office is an active partner with relevant agencies and other high-level county staff with expertise in mental health, public health, human services, community development, and services designed to meet people's basic needs. These leaders regularly work together to incorporate their varied perspectives on public safety decisions.
- **Sustainability.** The Sheriff's Office is an excellent place to work, with leadership, resources, operational stability, quality training, and realistic and clear expectations to carry out its mission efficiently.
- **Transparency & Continuous Evaluation.** To build trust and consistently improve its services to community, the Sheriff's Office has a culture of transparency and continuous evaluation of its operations by collecting and using appropriate information.
- **Trauma-informed Approach.** Officers have on-going training on utilizing a trauma informed approach to policing and have collaborative learning opportunities with human service providers.
- **Respect.** The King County Sheriff's Office respects the communities it serves and works continuously to reestablish trust and maintain the respect of King County communities.
- **Innovation in Alternative Response.** The Sheriff's Office provides the most appropriate service in response to public safety incidents. Alternative responses include technology-based tools, behavioral health professionals without armed police officers, and coordinated response with other agencies.
- **Accountability & Oversight.** The Sheriff's Office values public accountability and cooperates fully with civilian oversight in a timely and effective manner.
- **Discipline & Remedy.** Wrongdoing and excessive use of force committed by Sheriff's Office employees result in appropriate and meaningful discipline.
- **Clarity of Vision.** The Sheriff's Office is a high-performance organization with a clearly articulated vision of its role in the community and contribution to public safety.
- **Community Partnerships.** The Sheriff's Office co-creates and adjusts its services with the communities it serves. These community relationships and services are defined as specifically as possible to truly empower community voices.
- **Reflection of Communities.** The Sheriff's Office workforce reflects the race, ethnicity, identity, life experiences, and values of the communities it serves.

## RECRUITMENT PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

### Candidates

King County should be looking for candidates for a new Sheriff with the following qualities.

- **Law Enforcement & Community Background.** A law enforcement background, but also experience with community leadership. It may not be essential that candidates for Sheriff be currently commissioned as law enforcement officers, but such a background is important.
- **Inspiring Leader to motivate change.** Understanding of the need for changes in police services and the ability to both inspire these changes in department personnel and engender trust in the community.
- **Commitment to equity.** Full commitment to the vision of King County as a place where all people have equitable opportunities to thrive, including a proven track record of equitable practice by applying a race and social justice perspective that challenges the cultural norms that allow for institutional and systemic racism to exist in an organization.
- **Integrity.** An outstanding reputation for integrity, honesty, and transparency. (The trust of the community and of the public safety department's personnel is essential to the new Sheriff's success.)
- **Community partnerships.** A track record of successful partnerships with diverse communities focused on mutually agreed upon public safety goals.
- **Executive experience.** A diversity of executive experience in leading a sizable organization. (The new King County Sheriff will lead a department with hundreds of commissioned deputies and more than 1,000 employees.)
- **Competent & Credible.** Visible competency and credibility, both with the community and with department personnel.
- **Commitment to Follow-through.** Ability to demonstrate both the competency and commitment to lead the change and sustain it for the long term.



### *Criteria*

*King County should use the following criteria in selecting a short list of candidates for a new Sheriff:*

- **Demonstrated leadership.** Top candidates must be able to demonstrate inspiring leadership and tangible results in previous leadership positions.
- **Relevant experience.** Top candidates must have a substantial background of relevant experience leading a large organization, preferably in public safety services.
- **Proven track record.** Top candidates must be able to show the measurable outcomes of their previous work toward established goals within a large organization.
- **History of collaboration and partnerships.** Top candidates must have a history of collaboration with partner agencies and partnerships with community-based organizations that are affirmed by community testimony.
- **Record of success with elected officials, other jurisdictions, and unions.** Top candidates must have a record of success in dealing with elected officials and be able to demonstrate the political skills needed to deal effectively with elected officials, other jurisdictions, law enforcement union leaders and their members.
- **Knowledge of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ issues.** Top candidates must have a demonstrable understanding of the issues surrounding police services for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning communities; and other marginalized communities.

### *Public Engagement*

*King County should communicate with and engage input from the public during the recruitment process for a new Sheriff in the following ways:*

- **Public Engagement** should inform the decision-making process. This engagement should be planned in advance, accessible to all, and given an adequate timeline. Community input should be meaningful and valued.
- **PSAC & OLEO help with narrowing candidates.** The Public Safety Advisory Committee and the Office of Law Enforcement Oversight should play an active role in reviewing applications and narrowing candidates to a list of finalists.
- **Public Open Houses.** Once finalist candidates are selected, the County should hold a series of public open houses in which these candidates have an opportunity to exhibit their values, experience, and leadership qualities to the public, department personnel, and elected officials, as well as respond to public questions and concerns.
- **Input from BIPOC communities.** King County's Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color have experienced a disproportionate level of harms related to public safety and their voices should be prioritized. Representatives of these communities should have an opportunity to interview finalists and advise the County Executive and Council.
- **Input from contract agencies.** The cities, tribes, and transit agencies that contract with the Sheriff's Office make up a significant part of the agencies budget and activities, and thus should have an opportunity to interview finalists and advise the County Executive and Council.

***PSAC Role in Hiring:***

*The Public Safety Advisory Committee should be involved in the recruitment process for a new Sheriff in the following ways:*

- **Screening applications / selecting finalists.** The PSAC should have an opportunity to review applications and comment before finalist candidates are named.
- **Interviews.** The PSAC — as representatives of the County’s many stakeholders — should have an opportunity to interview finalists and advise the County Executive and Council.
- **Public Engagement.** As representatives of the County’s many stakeholders, the PSAC should have a central role in planning and ensuring effective public engagement during the recruitment process.

***FUTURE OF PUBLIC SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE***

*After making its recommendations on September 30, 2021, the Public Safety Advisory Committee should provide the following ongoing service.*

- **Intentional Ongoing Partnership.** The Public Safety Advisory Committee should evolve into a deliberate and ongoing partnership that includes representatives from the community, from the Sheriff’s Office, and from County leadership. This group will monitor progress toward this vision and communicate that progress to communities.
- **Ongoing information and input.** The PSAC should convene quarterly with the new Sheriff and other appropriate County departments to review and comment on the Sheriff’s Office’s and County’s progress toward the County’s public safety strategic objectives. The PSAC will also issue an annual report to the Executive and Council.
- **Future role of PSAC.** The PSAC should help define and realize public safety goals as crafted in this report. The PSAC should work with the new Sheriff to help make the recommendations of this report a reality. This accountability to the vision will help the new Sheriff and their department get police services right from the outset. \*
- **Community Input.** The PSAC should amplify diverse voices and be the conduit for ongoing community input on improving police services and other county services that affect public safety.

*\* This is distinct from (and not duplicative of) oversight after the fact when the department makes mistakes, which is the role of the Citizens Advisory Council on Law Enforcement Oversight.*