



## King County

### Dow Constantine

King County Executive

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September 29, 2022

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

Dear Councilmember Balducci:

I am pleased to transmit a proposed ballot measure Ordinance to create the Crisis Care Centers (CCC) Levy. At the exact moment that our region's behavioral health needs are growing, our 2.3 million person county lacks even one walk-in behavioral health urgent care facility. Nearly one-third of our mental health residential treatment beds are gone. The behavioral health workforce – the people upon whom we depend to provide care – cannot attract, retain, or pay enough to change course. We must, therefore, act with urgency and at scale to meet this moment.

For too long, our community has relied on jails, hospital emergency rooms, shelters, and supportive housing to act as treatment facilities because we lack better places for people to go for immediate behavioral health crisis care. When people in behavioral health crisis have a place to go for care, these systems work better: hospitals have more capacity, fewer people are in jail, and shelters and supportive housing can focus on connecting people to housing stability.

The proposed Crisis Care Centers Levy provides a key part of the solution to these challenges. It would provide:

- **Places to Go in a Crisis:** A new regional network of five crisis care centers, including one for youth.
- **Places to Go to Recover:** Funding to restore mental health residential treatment capacity to 2017 levels by reinforcing aging existing facilities and adding new beds.
- **People to Provide the Care:** Investments to support more equitable compensation models in funded facilities, as well as recruitment and retention strategies for the region's entire behavioral health workforce.

As of September 2022, there is one voluntary behavioral health crisis facility for the entirety of King County. There is no walk-in urgent care behavioral health facility in all of King County. Notably, the success of federal, state, and local investments in the new national 988 call line, mobile crisis teams, shelters, and supportive housing depends upon sufficient access to

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behavioral health crisis care to give residents immediate, voluntary access in all regions of King County. King County needs places where people can go for immediate, life-saving care during a behavioral health crisis.

Struggles with anxiety, depression, and other severe mental health challenges have risen in King County and nationally in recent years. In this moment, King County needs more behavioral health services, not less. Yet the community behavioral health system is losing capacity at an alarming rate and cannot sustain its workforce. King County has a total of 244 mental health residential treatment beds for the entire County, down 111 beds, or nearly one third, from the capacity in 2018 of 355 beds. These essential resources provide places for people with intensive mental health needs to stabilize and recover in the community.

While new facilities are a critical part of the solution, they depend on a robust, representative, and supported workforce. The behavioral health workforce has for too long been underpaid, overworked, and pushed to the brink. Too many within our behavioral health workforce cannot afford to live in the communities they serve. Too few people are joining this profession, and too many people are leaving it.

My CCC Levy proposal would present voters with a nine-year property tax levy lid lift at \$0.145 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The proposed CCC Levy would begin collections in 2024. We estimate that the owner of a median priced home in King County would pay approximately \$121 per year, or approximately \$10 per month, based on estimated 2024 home values. The Levy is expected to generate approximately \$1.25 billion between 2024 and the end of the levy in 2032. If the King County Council approves the proposed CCC Levy ballot measure Ordinance, the measure would be before King County voters in April 2023.

The proposed CCC Levy will provide a generational expansion in behavioral health crisis service access at the scale necessary to give King County residents who are in crisis places to go and places to recover from serious mental health conditions, while also investing in the people who provide needed care. These Levy funded investments will increase public well-being and safety. It will give families, first responders, and crisis response teams more and better places to connect people to care instead of jails and emergency rooms.

This proposed legislation to create a new Crisis Care Centers Levy furthers the King County Strategic Plan health and human services goal to improve the health and wellbeing of all people in our community. The Levy would support the King County Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) Strategic Plan goal to invest upstream and where needs are greatest, including funding behavioral health care as a preventative approach. It would also further ESJ plan goals through its strong partnerships with communities and provider agencies and would make pro-equity investments to sustain the distressed behavioral health workforce.

Thank you for your consideration of this important proposed Ordinance that would offer King County voters the opportunity to significantly expand behavioral health care access in this region through a new levy.


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

Sincerely,

 for

Dow Constantine  
King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: King County Councilmembers

ATTN: Stephanie Cirkovich, Chief of Staff

Melani Pedroza, Clerk of the Council

Shannon Braddock, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive

Karan Gill, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive

Mina Hashemi, Council Relations Director, Office of the Executive

Leo Flor, Director, Department of Community and Human Services