

December 11, 2017

King County Council  
516 Third Ave, Room 1200  
Seattle WA, 98104

Via electronic mail: rod.dembowski@kingcounty.gov  
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Re: Ordinance No. 2017-0473 –ordinance related to juvenile isolation

Dear Councilmembers:

I am writing to address one issue related to the use of isolation against youth. The ordinance as proposed today addresses many issues regarding the use of isolation against youth under the age of 18 charged as adults in King County. These youth who are subject to the “auto-decline” law have been held at the Regional Justice Center (RJC) until recently. During that incarceration, many of them were subject to inhumane isolation practices.

The ordinance passed today takes important steps toward addressing those practices and ending them for that category of youth. While there is still work to be done as King County implements the ordinance and actually drafts policies and procedures and trains staff, we appreciate the work that the Council has taken to quickly address concerns raised in the lawsuit.

However, we remain concerned regarding the use of isolation against youth who were 18 at the time of the crime charged. This ordinance does not address the use of isolation against this category of youth. Any youth who was 18, 19, or 20 at the time of the charged offense and unable to make bail will continue to be held at the RJC or King County Jail. Based upon our investigation of the circumstances facing auto-declined youth, we are concerned that the type of long term isolation that we discovered there may continue to be used against youth who are 18, 19 or 20 at the time of the charged offense.



**THE ALLIANCE**  
*for Equal Justice*

Basic Human Needs Project • Children and Youth Project • Economic Justice Project • Institutions Project • Working Families Project

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If the County continues to subject that category of youth to long term isolation without meaningful time out of their cells and without appropriate programming and social interactions, the Council should take steps to ensure that the County ends those practices and moves to a more appropriate, humane correctional system.

Training of staff to appropriately manage youth and other populations with special developmental or mental health needs has been shown to dramatically reduce or eliminate the need for punitive, long term isolation practices. The County should ensure that all Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention staff receive appropriate training, and the supervision and tools to then implement that training.

We thank the Council for working on this issue and passing Ordinance No. 2017-0473, particularly Councilmember Dembowski who has championed these issues. It is a good start toward addressing the use of isolation more broadly at the RJC and King County Jails. We look forward to working with you on these issues going forward.

Sincerely,

/s

Nick Straley  
Columbia Legal Services

cc: Marka Steadman, Law and Justice Committee Assistant  
Clerk of the Council  
King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office