



King County

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King County Executive

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January 27, 2021

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 that would, if enacted, place a measure before King County voters to renew and expand the voter approved Best Starts for Kids Levy (BSK or Best Starts). Accompanying this proposed ordinance is the Best Starts Blueprint Report.

The start we give our children now will define our region's health, prosperity and equity for a generation. As you know, Best Starts is King County's groundbreaking community-driven and science-informed initiative that helps our children, youth, young adults and families realize their full potential to be healthy, happy, safe, and thriving.

The attached Blueprint Report provides background on the first Best Starts levy, approved by voters in 2015, and describes the renewal and expansion proposal. Through partnerships with more than 500 community-based organizations (CBOs), Best Starts has funded nearly 600 programs throughout King County. Across its investment areas and programs, Best Starts has served more than 500,000 children, youth, young adults, and families.

My proposal asks the voters to approve the levy at \$0.19 per \$1,000 of assessed value, compared with \$0.14 per \$1000 for the initial 2015 Best Starts levy. It is estimated that a homeowner of a median priced home in King County would pay \$114 per year. If approved by voters, the renewed and expanded Best Starts for Kids Levy would continue the existing intergenerational investments serving children, youth, young adults, and families and respond to emerging needs and community input.

With the funds from a renewed and expanded levy, I propose the following new and expanded investments:

- A new child care subsidy program for more than 3,000 low-income children;
- A new workforce demonstration project for low wage child care workers;
- Expansion of out of school time programs for school-age children;
- Up to four new school-based health centers, and
- Expansion of transitions to adulthood programs for youth and young adults.

As outlined in the attached Blueprint Report, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the existing child care crisis, significantly impacting children, their families, child care workers, and the region's employers and economy. While awareness of the vital role of child care has been growing for years, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated its importance for the region's health and safety. Essential workers and critical services required access to emergency child care supports so that first responders, medical providers, the food services industry, and others in critical roles could keep serving society while the rest of society entered shutdowns to slow the spread of the disease.

Affordable, accessible child care is necessary to improve racial and gender equity in King County and will be critical in the region's economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. While King County cannot build and maintain a healthy and equitable child care sector alone, the County has the opportunity and the moral imperative to provide clear leadership and to support families just out of reach of state and federal child care programs. Best Starts funds will be used to complement and leverage King County's existing child care investments to improve affordability and equity.

Renewing and expanding the Best Starts for Kids levy furthers the King County Strategic Plan health and human services goal to improve the health and wellbeing of all people in our county, along with supporting the goal's objectives to ensure that babies are born healthy and establish a strong foundation for lifelong health and well-being and to provide equitable opportunities for all children to progress through childhood safe and healthy, with academic and life skills to thrive in their community. Similarly, Best Starts supports the work called for in King County's Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan, and the 2015 Youth Action Plan through strengthening families and communities and maximizing the assets and knowledge of our richly diverse county and its many cultures and communities.

This report required approximately 150 staff hours to produce, costing approximately \$9,133.

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I thank you for your consideration of this proposed ordinance to renew and expand the Best Starts for Kids Levy and for your strong support for children, youth, young adults and families across King County and respectfully urge the King County Council to adopt the proposed legislation and ask voters to approve the renewal of Best Starts for Kids in August 2021.

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

Enclosures

cc: King County Councilmembers
ATTN: Carolyn Busch, Chief of Staff
Melani Pedroza, Clerk of the Council
Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget
Shannon Braddock, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive
Karan Gill, Director, Council Relations, Office of the Executive
Leo Flor, Director, Department of Community and Human Services
Patty Hayes, Director, Public Health – Seattle & King County