



 King County
Children + Youth
Advisory Board

To: Regional Policy Committee
From: Hikma Sherka and Jessica Werner, CYAB Co-Chairs
King County Children and Youth Advisory Board (CYAB)
Re: Best Starts for Kids Renewal, Amendments
Date: March 24, 2021

Dear Members of the Regional Policy Committee:

We are writing in strong support of the Best Starts for Kids Levy Renewal, as submitted by Executive Constantine. The ordinance was informed by our communities over the past 6 years and investments are beginning to show results. The investments made to date by Best Starts for Kids, and the additional recommended investments that were vetted and elevated after considerable community input should be made as recommended.

The Children and Youth Advisory Board met on March 23rd and discussed at length the proposed amendments to the Best Starts for Kids Levy Ordinance. We considered many factors and determined that we are not in support of dedicating \$50 Million to capital projects as proposed at this time. We believe strongly in the investments in Best Starts for Kids and request the funding stay focused on services and operations rather than stretching into capital.

As we continue to weather the dual pandemics of racism and Covid-19, our Black and Brown communities in particular, deserve investment in the programs and services that can support wellbeing and the vision for our young people to be happy, healthy, safe and thriving. We know that the need for connection, mentorship, social and emotional support and other positive activities that BSK strategies invest in will be critical for our young people to come out of the pandemic with resilience. We also know that there are many spaces and places that could possibly be repurposed as businesses continue working remotely.

Our equity statement has guided our work since 2015, stating that:

Equity is an ardent journey toward well-being as defined by the affected. Equity demands sacrifice and redistribution of power and resources in order to break systems of oppression, heal continuing wounds, and realize justice. To achieve equity and social justice, we must first root out deeply entrenched systems of racism. Equity proactively builds strong foundations of agency, is vigilant for unintended consequences, and boldly aspires to be restorative. Equity is disruptive and uncomfortable and not voluntary. Equity is fundamental to the community we want to build.

We are concerned that the amendment proposing capital was not in alignment with our equity statement, in that it did not come directly from those most impacted by inequities, and that we perceive potential unintended consequences of shifting to capital investments with this funding stream.

However, we also recognize that there are capital needs in King County, and should an amendment move forward through the RPC to support facilities and capital needs, we strongly recommend:

- Assurance that capital expenditures would benefit youth and communities of color;
- Assurance that these public dollars would allow for long-term access to free/very low cost programming that is provided in the buildings;
- Facility spaces that can be multiuse and intergenerational;
- Investing in capital repairs, maintenance, upgrades rather than entirely new buildings;
- Investing in rural communities with lack of transportation and lack of spaces;
- Exploration of covered outdoor spaces;
- Not tying up a specific amount of money in capital projects as projections may change.

We believe the BSK strategies are transformational and the right ones to make progress for our kids. While we know there are innumerable needs in the county, there are no other revenue sources that are as nationally recognized and transformational for our community, and we need to focus resources where it will make the biggest difference.

We thank you for your service and for your support for Best Starts for Kids Renewal. We look forward to seeing the levy on the ballot this summer.

The King County Children and Youth Advisory Board
March 24, 2021