



Legislation Text

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A MOTION reaffirming the King County council's support of unbanked money transfer operators and the immigrant communities they serve.

WHEREAS, money transfer operators ("MTOs") in King County, and across the United States, have been unable to secure bank accounts due to a process referred to as "bank derisking," and

WHEREAS, a recent string of armed robberies on those unbanked MTOs in SeaTac, Seattle and surrounding cities has turned the issue into a public safety concern, and

WHEREAS, East African immigrant communities in King County rely on those MTOs to send money to their loved ones abroad. Funding from remittances accounts for basic needs including food, water, shelter and education, and

WHEREAS, over the past few years, those MTOs have found it increasingly difficult to operate without bank accounts. Many have shut down, and the ones that remain transport millions of dollars in cash through SeaTac Airport each month, and

WHEREAS, those MTOs: provide culturally specific services; deliver money to remote regions not served by the large operators, including refugee camps in East Africa; provide good paying jobs; contribute to community activities; and are a valuable members of King County's small-business community, and

WHEREAS, King County has one of the largest African communities in the United States; nearly 51,000 people from sub-Saharan Africa are residents in King County, and

WHEREAS, the vast majority of our East African residents are refugees and our new residents need effective systems that will support them in staying connected to their loved ones back home, and

WHEREAS, East Africans are critical to King County's economic vitality because they purchase goods

and services and run small businesses, which in turn create jobs and generate revenue for the region, and

WHEREAS, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals participants and religious institutions, such as mosques, also struggle to secure reliable banking services, and

WHEREAS, it is in King County's interest to promote financial inclusion and public safety, and

WHEREAS, the state of Washington has jurisdiction over state-licensed banks, and

WHEREAS, the state of Washington has the authority to pass laws and develop processes that promote financial inclusion and public safety;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The council reaffirms its support of our East African community in their desires to support their loved ones, and also reaffirms the right of MTOs to engage in lawful commerce in a safe manner.

B. The council calls on the Washington state Senate Financial Institutions, Economic Development and Trade Committee and the Washington state House of Representatives Consumer Protection and Business Committee to study the issue of bank derisking and to find a solution that promotes financial inclusion and public safety for immigrant communities throughout the state.

C. The council directs its government relations team to reach out to the state of Washington and the Washington state Legislature to explore actions they can take to promote financial inclusion for King County residents and businesses.