



## Legislation Text

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AN ORDINANCE providing for the submission to the qualified electors of King County at a special election to be held in King County on November 8, 2005, of a proposition to provide regional health and human services to residents of King County by authorizing a property tax levy in excess of the levy limitation contained in chapter 84.55 RCW, for a consecutive six year period at a rate of not more than \$0.05 per one thousand dollars of assessed valuation, for the purpose of providing funding to enable the provision of health and human services such as housing, mental health counseling, substance abuse prevention and treatment, employment assistance and other essential regional health and human services for residents of King County and establishing two county citizen oversight boards to review and report on expenditures of levy proceeds, contingent on voter approval of the levy.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

**SECTION 1. Findings:**

A. Chapter 73.08 RCW is titled "Veterans' Relief" and assigns responsibility for veterans' aid to counties. This provision was originally made in 1888 following the Civil War. RCW 73.08.080 establishes a specific property tax for counties to provide veterans' assistance for eligible veterans and their dependents. This statute requires counties to levy a property tax of between 1.125 cents and 27 cents per one thousand dollars of assessed value for veterans' assistance. This portion of the county's regular property tax levy amount is dedicated to veterans' relief.

B. The veterans levy was established by King County and first levied at a rate of \$0.025 per one thousand dollars of assessed value but subsequent changes in state law limiting property tax increases in chapter 84.55 RCW and a recent initiative, Initiative 747, have reduced the effective rate. The current millage is approximately \$0.0088 per one thousand dollars of assessed value. Therefore, a home with an assessed value of \$300,000 currently pays approximately \$2.60 a year to support local veterans' assistance programs.

C. Approximately 180,900 veterans live in King County representing twenty-seven percent of the state's veterans. The population of veterans in the state is growing and Washington ranks twelfth nationwide for the total number of veterans in the state.

D. The federal Department of Veterans Affairs ("DVA") spent nearly \$1,500,000,000 in Washington in 2003 to serve nearly 641,000 veterans who live in the state. Last year, over 85,000 people in Washington received health care and more than 94,000 veterans and survivors received disability compensation or pension payments from the DVA. More than 12,000 veterans, reservists or survivors used GI Bill payments for their education over 75,000 veterans, reservists or survivors own homes with active DVA home loan guarantees. And over 2,000 interments have been conducted at Tahoma National Cemetery since it opened in 1997.

E. In fiscal year 2003, DVA facilities in Washington had 12,058 inpatient admissions at DVA and contracted community facilities and provided 1,020,972 outpatient visits, including community outpatient care. In Washington, DVA operates major medical centers in Walla Walla and Spokane, as well as a two-division facility, the VA Puget Sound Health Care system, in Seattle and Tacoma. VA Puget Sound operates 512 beds, with 291 authorized or acute care, 131 nursing home beds, 60 domiciliary beds and 30 residential rehabilitation beds. VA Puget Sound operates a community-based outpatient clinic in Bremerton and contracts primary care with the University of Washington Physicians Network clinics in Shoreline, Federal Way and Woodinville. These clinics serve 3,000 patients. Outpatient clinics provide primary and in some cases mental health care, while specialty care is provided at the medical center.

F. The Veterans Integrated Service Network ("VISN") 20, which includes Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and

Washington, reported the highest percentage of homeless veterans hospitalized for mental health reasons at nearly fifty percent, compared with VA's national average of twenty-eight percent. The network ranked fifth in the nation for the percentage of homeless veterans with acute psychiatric disorders and fourth in the nation for admissions of homeless veterans with substance abuse problems, which is nearly double the national average.

G. The Puget Sound region has a growing homeless population, estimated to be as many as 8,000 on any given night. The DVA estimates that there are as many as 2,800 homeless veterans in the Puget Sound region. In King County the estimate is around 1,500 to 1,600 homeless veterans based on an overall homeless population of 6,500. Many factors contribute to the problem of homelessness among veterans. Unemployment, chemical and substance abuse and mental illness are prominent among them.

H. The National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD") estimates that thirty percent of men of women who have served in the military during conflict will suffer from mental illness. PTSD can cause problems such as memory and cognitive disorders, inability to function in social or family life, severe depression and occupational instability. Substance abuse is an extremely common form of self-medication in those suffering from PTSD, according to the center's studies.

I. According to the DVA, about forty-eight percent of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness and slightly more than sixty-eight percent have suffered from drug or alcohol or drug abuse problems. Thirty-five percent have both psychiatric and substance abuse disorders. As the largest and most complex medical center in the VISN 20 network, VA Puget Sound Health Care system reported the highest percentage of homeless veterans in its acute mental health programs.

J. According to the DVA, across the nation one-third of adult homeless men and nearly one-quarter of all homeless adults have served in the armed forces. More than 299,000 veterans may be homeless on any given night and as many as 500,000 may experience homelessness during a year. Many other veterans are considered at risk because of poverty, lack of support from family and friends and precarious living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing.

K. According to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, despite statutory requirements and annual increases in the Veterans Health Administration budget each year, the VA's mental health and addiction treatment capacity has deteriorated. Closures or curtailment of inpatient psychiatric and residential substance abuse rehabilitation facilities have not been counteracted by complementary increases in outpatient treatment capacity. According to the VA Committee on the Care of Veterans with Serious Mental Illness, VA spending on mental health and addiction services has declined by eight percent over the past seven years, and by twenty-five percent when adjusted for inflation.

L. The VA reports that since the start of war in Iraq in March, 2003 more than 26,000 men and women in the military have applied to receive their benefits. Fully a third of those claims have still not been processed.

M. The annual operating budget for King County's veterans' program is approximately \$2,100,000. The operating budget currently funds seven full-time employees, contract services and direct aid for eligible veterans.

N. King County's veterans services include:

1. Financial aid and emergency assistance for rent, food, utilities, medical needs and burial;
2. Employment services such as job placement, career counseling, job training; transportation and employment support services, such as clothing and tools;
3. Mental health counseling, including crisis and PTSD counseling and intervention services; and
4. Case management services, which provide assistance for those needing transitional or permanent housing, claims or help getting into treatment programs.

O. King County also contracts for veteran services to provide long-term housing, short-term housing, treatment for trauma, homeless prevention, veterans' incarcerated prevention and other programs.

P. The county's current expense fund faces continuing challenges in future years, including anticipated shortfalls in 2006 and 2007 in excess of twenty million dollars each year. As a discretionary service under state law, human service funding is threatened with significant additional cuts if they remain reliant primarily on

current expense funding.

**SECTION 2. Definitions.** The definitions in this section apply throughout this ordinance unless the context clearly require otherwise.

A. "Family" means a veteran's or military personnel's spouse, domestic partner or child or the child of the spouse or domestic partner or other dependent relatives if living in the household of a veteran or military personnel.

B. "Human services for veterans" means services and projects of the King County veterans' program specifically developed to meet the needs of veterans, military personnel and their families in King County.

C. "Levy" means the levy of regular property taxes for the specific purpose and term provided in this ordinance and authorized by the electorate in accordance with state law.

D. "Levy proceeds" means the principal amount of funds raised by the levy and any interest earnings on the funds.

E. "Military personnel" means those persons currently serving in a branch of the military, including the National Guard and reservists for any branch of the military.

F. "Regional health and human services" means a range of services and related capital facilities, including housing, that meet basic human needs and promote safe and healthy communities including but not limited to:

1. Prevention and early intervention services that reduce or prevent adverse human behaviors and social conditions that lead to crises, serious dysfunction or disability;
2. Criminal justice linked services that assist individuals and their families avoid or mitigate their involvement with the justice system;
3. Crisis intervention services that address life threatening situations and other crises;
4. Rehabilitation and support services that provide treatment for individual and family problems or

provides support to maintain or enhance their present level of independence.

G. "Veterans" mean those persons who have served in any branch of the military, including the National Guard and reservists for any branch of the military.

**SECTION 3. Levy submittal to voters.** To provide necessary funds for the provision of regional health and human services to King County's veterans, military personnel and their families, the county council shall submit to the qualified electors of the county a proposition authorizing a regular property tax levy in excess of the levy limitation contained in chapter 84.55 RCW for six consecutive years, commencing in 2005, with collection beginning in 2006, at a rate not to exceed five cents per one thousand dollars of assessed value. In accordance with RCW 84.55.050, this levy shall be a regular property tax levy, which is subject to the statutory rate limit of RCW 84.52.043

**SECTION 4. Deposit of levy proceeds.** The levy proceeds shall be deposited in two special revenue funds which fund shall be created by ordinance. The levy proceeds shall be divided to place fifty percent of the levy proceeds in one fund designated for the provision of regional health and human services for veterans, military personnel and their families. The remaining fifty percent of the levy proceeds shall be placed in another fund designated for the provision of regional health and human services to a wide range of low-income people in need of such services.

**SECTION 5. Eligible expenditures.** If approved by the qualified electors of the county, all levy proceeds shall be used to pay the costs associated with provision of regional health and human services to a wide range of low-income people in need of such services, including, but not limited to, services for veterans, military personnel and their families, services for children and youth, the elderly, the unemployed and underemployed and for services specific to veterans' needs such as treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder and specialized employment assistance. The regional health and human services will also include a range of regional health and human services and related capital facilities including, but not limited to, housing

assistance, homelessness prevention, mental health counseling substance abuse prevention and treatment and employment assistance.

Eligible expenditures shall also include payment of costs to strengthen and improve the health and human services system and infrastructure to provide greater access to services and engender better coordination and integration of regional health and human services addressing the needs of veterans, military personnel and their families.

**SECTION 6. Call for special election.** In accordance with RCW 29A.04.321, it is hereby deemed that an emergency exists requiring the submission to the qualified electors of the county at a special election to be held on November 8, 2005, a proposition authorizing a regular property tax levy for the purposes described in this ordinance. The manager of the records, elections and licensing services division shall cause notice to be given of this ordinance in accordance with the state constitution and general law and to submit to the qualified electors of the county, at the said special county election, the proposition hereinafter set forth. The clerk of the council shall certify that proposition to the manager of the records, elections and licensing services division, in substantially the following form, with such additions, deletions or modifications as may be required for the proposition listed below by the prosecuting attorney:

PROPOSITION \_\_\_: The King County council has passed Ordinance \_\_\_\_\_ concerning funding for regional health and human services. This proposition would fund health and human services such as housing assistance, mental health counseling, substance abuse prevention and treatment and employment assistance. It would also fund capital facilities and improved access to and coordination of services for veterans, military personnel and their families. It would authorize King County to exceed RCW 84.55 regular property tax limitations and levy an additional property tax of 5 cents per \$1,000 of assessed valuation for six consecutive years with collection beginning in 2006. Should this proposition be:

Approved? \_\_\_\_\_

Rejected? \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION 7. County citizen oversight boards established.** If the levy is approved by the voters in accordance with section 6 of this ordinance, two county citizen oversight boards shall be established. The boards shall consist of twelve members, to be appointed on or after January 15, 2006. The veterans citizen oversight board shall oversee the funds for regional human services for veterans, military personnel and their families. The regional human service board shall oversee the funds for regional health and human services for a wide range of low-income people in need of such services. Each councilmember shall nominate a representative from the councilmember's district to each board. If the executive does not appoint a person who has been nominated by a councilmember, the executive must request that the councilmember nominate another candidate for appointment. The executive shall appoint three representatives from the membership of the King County veterans advisory board to serve on the citizen oversight board. For the regional human services board, the executive shall nominate three at-large representatives who are poor or represent an organization that is composed of the poor, such as Welfare Rights, Retired Senior Citizens, Seattle Young People Project and others. These at-large members shall also be from three geographic areas of King County representing: south King County; east King County; and Seattle and north King County. Board members shall be confirmed by the council. Members shall be residents of King County with a diverse, balanced representation of private and public sectors, veterans, community leaders, jurisdictions and human service representatives. Members shall be residents of King County and may not be elected or appointed officials of any unit of government. On or before June 1 of each year beginning in the year 2007, the board shall review and report to the King County executive and the King County council on the expenditure of levy proceeds.

**SECTION 8. Ratification.** Certification of the proposition by the clerk of the county council to the manager of the records and elections division in accordance with law before the election on November 8, 2005, and any other act consistent with the authority and before the effective date of this ordinance are hereby ratified and confirmed.

**SECTION 9. Severability.** If any provision of this ordinance or its application to



any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the ordinance or the application of the provision to other persons or circumstances is not affected.

none