

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 April 22, 2025, of a proposition to reauthorize an expired regular property tax levy in excess of the levy limitation contained in chapter 84.55 RCW, for a consecutive seven year period beginning in 2026 at the rate of not more than \$0.0275 per one thousand dollars of assessed valuation, with the 2026 levy amount being the base for computing maximum allowable levy amounts under chapter 84.55 RCW for years two through seven (2027-2032), for the purpose of funding the continued operation of the regional automated fingerprint identification system, also known as AFIS, which maintains expanded crime scene and arrest identification technology and services for all local criminal justice agencies in King County.

STATEMENT OF FACTS:

1. To expand and enhance upon the limited identification services provided by individual city and county law enforcement agencies or at the state level, in 1986 the voters of King County approved funding for the purchase of a shared regional automated fingerprint identification system ("AFIS") computer, which matches unknown fingerprints to known fingerprints. King County's AFIS database holds over two million fingerprint records, over one million palmprint records, and approximately sixty-three thousand crime scene prints from unsolved cases. The King County AFIS is a regional system with program services available to every city and unincorporated area in King County.

2. The AFIS computer is used for two primary purposes:
 - a. To quickly identify arrested individuals, and prevent the wrongful release of those who use false names to evade arrest warrants or hide criminal records; and
 - b. To search fingerprints and palmprints collected from crime scenes to identify unknown suspects and aid in convictions.

3. The county first purchased the shared AFIS computer after the voters of King County approved a property tax levy for that purpose in November 1986. The ballot measure was authorized by Ordinance 7747. Since 1986, the voters of King County have continued to endorse the service by approving renewal property tax levies ranging from \$0.0200 to \$0.0665 per one thousand dollars of assessed valuation as needed to support, expand, and enhance AFIS services. The levy history for the AFIS program is:
 - a. Five-year renewal levy approved in November 1990. The ballot measure was authorized by Ordinance 9603;
 - b. Five-year renewal levy approved in November 1995. The ballot measure was authorized by Ordinance 11948;
 - c. Five-year renewal levy approved in September 2000. The ballot measure was authorized by Ordinance 13894. Funding sustained AFIS program operations through 2006 without a concurrent property tax levy;
 - d. Six-year reauthorization levy approved in September 2006. The ballot measure was authorized by Ordinance 15537. Below budget program spending allowed the county to reduce levy rates in 2011 and 2012;
 - e. Six-year renewal levy approved in November 2012. The ballot measure was authorized by Ordinance 17381; and
 - f. Six-year renewal levy approved in August 2018. The ballot measure was authorized by

Ordinance 18674. Through conservative spending, the county accumulated a fund balance, which will sustain AFIS program operations through 2025 without a concurrent property tax levy.

4. The AFIS computer was first installed in 1988. That initial system was updated in 1999, and then replaced with a new system in 2011. The new system introduced palmprint searching for the first time in King County. The system was upgraded in 2018 to a cloud-based system which is continually updated to ensure the county is using the latest fingerprint matching technology.

5. The 2018 AFIS levy, which was adopted at a rate of \$0.03501 per one thousand dollars of assessed valuation, expired on December 31, 2024. Through prudent fiscal management, a balance has accumulated in the AFIS fund over the past six years. The balance will be used to sustain appropriations in 2025 and continue AFIS program operations without a concurrent property tax levy. This ordinance proposes a renewed AFIS levy at a rate of \$0.0275 per one thousand dollars of assessed valuation with collections beginning in 2026. Without renewed revenue, fund balances will be depleted after 2025 and funding for the program will end.

6. Large cities and metropolitan areas around the country have realized great benefit from having their own AFIS technology and supporting staff, but it is often not affordable for local independent police agencies. King County is the only county in the state of Washington with its own AFIS computer, and it is the only Washington county with a shared, regional model that provides services to all local law enforcement agencies. By centralizing services, technology, and resources, the regional approach supports crime-solving at a lower overall cost, through economy of scale. Other benefits of a regional approach include a larger, higher quality database that results in more identifications, and more information sharing between agencies.

7. In 2023, the AFIS program searched almost fifty-one thousand electronically submitted fingerprint records and identified over two hundred individuals who had given false names when

arrested. The program responded to over three thousand requests for crime scene assistance, processed over fifteen thousand pieces of evidence and identified well over five thousand crime scene prints. The AFIS computer was also used to search almost six thousand fingerprint records submitted by officers in the field using mobile identification devices.

8. King County criminal justice agencies consider the AFIS program to be essential to law enforcement, and the AFIS program has been recognized for its exceptional standards and service. The program's regional model has provided effective crime-solving support to all criminal justice agencies in King County since its inception in 1988. The current AFIS program provides for many shared services, including:

- a. The purchase, maintenance, and staff operation of the AFIS computer which stores, searches and provides potential matches for fingerprints and palmprints;
- b. The purchase, maintenance, training and support for fifty-five Livescans, which are fingerprinting devices installed throughout King County for the purpose of collecting high-quality prints from arrestees and applicants and transmitting them electronically for a faster and more efficient comparison and response;
- c. The purchase, maintenance, training and support for three-hundred handheld mobile identification devices, which enable officers to quickly search fingerprints in the field, aiding the officers in determining whether to detain or release an unknown subject;
- d. The recording of high-quality fingerprints in county jail facilities, and fingerprint examiners available twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, for the quick identification of arrested individuals;
- e. Examiners and technicians who collect prints from crime scenes, process items of evidence chemically, preserve those prints photographically, and search them in AFIS to identify unknown potential suspects or store the unidentified prints for continual search as new records are added

to the system; and

f. Training on fingerprint collection and crime scene processing, and customer support for all law enforcement agencies.

9. During the last six years, the AFIS program has maintained effective operations, achieved efficiencies to reduce staffing, updated the AFIS computer, replaced end-of-life MobileID devices, and replaced the outdated and undersized processing laboratory and AFIS offices.

10. The AFIS program has developed a seven-year budget overview with associated revenue projections for 2026-2032. The proposed levy would maintain current services with a first-year levy rate that is lower than the first-year levy rate approved by voters in 2018.

11. The AFIS program produces publicly available annual reports that provide status updates on program initiatives and accomplishments. The success of the regional AFIS program has been a result of regular collaboration with law enforcement agencies across King County.

12. The proposed levy will be authorized for seven years.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF KING COUNTY:

SECTION 1. Definitions. The definitions in this section apply throughout this ordinance unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

A. "AFIS" means automated fingerprint identification system.

B. "AFIS computer" means the automated fingerprint identification system, which is the computer system that utilizes AFIS as its foundation, and through modular design incorporates other databases of criminal identification records, and related equipment, technology, networks and interfaces employed by trained staff for capturing, storing and comparing criminal identification records based on friction ridge analysis, or successor technology.

C. "AFIS program" means the acquisition, implementation, maintenance and operation of the regional AFIS computer. "AFIS program" also means the countywide effort of trained personnel who, through

fingerprints, palmprints and other identification methods: identify detained persons; identify suspects of crimes from fingerprints and palmprints left on evidence at crime scenes and other locations; assist in the conviction of criminals through these identifications; train law enforcement on crime scene evidence collection and identification methods; support accurate and complete criminal history records; conduct field research aimed at improving and enhancing program services; and otherwise enhance public safety as consistent with this ordinance and permitted by law.

D. "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.

E. "Levy proceeds" means the principal amount of moneys raised by the levy, any interest earnings on the moneys, and the proceeds of any interim financing following authorization of the levy.

SECTION 2. Levy submittal to voters. To provide necessary moneys for the AFIS program, the King County council shall submit to the qualified electors of the county a proposition to reauthorize an expired regular property tax levy in excess of the levy limitation contained in chapter 84.55 RCW for seven consecutive years, with collections beginning in 2026, at a rate not to exceed \$0.0275 per one thousand dollars of assessed value in the first year of the levy period. The dollar amount of the levy in the first year shall be the base upon which the maximum allowable levy amounts in years two through seven (2027-2032) shall be calculated using the limit factor in chapter 84.55 RCW, as amended.

SECTION 3. Deposit of levy proceeds. All levy proceeds collected as authorized in this ordinance shall be deposited into a subfund in the automated fingerprint identification system fund and used only for the eligible expenditures described in section 4 of this ordinance.

SECTION 4. Eligible expenditures. If approved by the qualified electors of the county, all proceeds of the levy authorized in this ordinance shall be used to pay the costs of the AFIS program, together with the necessary software and hardware operations and maintenance expenses and such sums as are necessary to provide for the costs incurred by the county that are attributable to AFIS levy elections. Eligible expenditures

include the salaries, benefits, training, office and laboratory supplies and equipment, workspace, contracted goods and services, related studies and research, administration, and other costs incidental to the operation and enhancement of the regional AFIS program. Workspace expenditures may include the lease, rental, or purchase of land or building space to house AFIS program technology, staff, or laboratory functions.

Eligible expenditures shall also include nonbonded debt and finance costs and the reimbursement of extraordinary expenditures incurred by the county after the effective date of this ordinance with regard to the AFIS program. The AFIS levy is intended as supplemental funding to maintain the current expanded crime scene and arrest identification technology and services on a shared regional basis, which lowers the cost of technology and staff through economy of scale and makes the benefit accessible to all agencies. The levy shall not at any time provide general criminal justice funding or fund programs or purposes not otherwise consistent with this ordinance.

SECTION 5. Call for special election. In accordance with RCW 29A.04.321, the King County council hereby calls for a special election to be held on April 22, 2025. The King County director of elections 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 King County director of elections in substantially the following form, with such modifications as may be required by the prosecuting attorney:

King County

Proposition No. 1

Regional Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) Levy

The King County council has passed Ordinance ___ concerning this proposition for the regional automated fingerprint identification system (AFIS) levy. This proposition would fund the continued operation of the AFIS program to provide enhanced forensic fingerprint and palmprint technology and services to aid in the administration of justice. It would authorize an additional

property tax for seven years beginning in 2026 at \$0.0275 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, use the 2026 levy amount to compute limitations under Chapter 84.55 RCW for subsequent levies in 2027-2032, and exempt eligible seniors, veterans, and disabled persons under RCW 84.36.381.

Should this proposition be:

Approved []

Rejected []

SECTION 6. AFIS advisory committee extension. If the levy is approved by the voters in accordance with section 5 of this ordinance, the AFIS advisory committee previously authorized by the voters shall be retained to review AFIS operations and expenditures and make recommendations concerning the AFIS program.

SECTION 7. Ratification. Certification of the proposition by the clerk of the King County council to the director of elections in accordance with law before the election on April 22, 2025, and any other act consistent with the authority and before the effective date of this ordinance are hereby ratified and confirmed.

SECTION 8. 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.