

July 2, 2021

Dear King County Councilmembers Balducci, Dembowski, Dunn, Kohl-Wells, Lambert, McDermott, Upthegrove, von Reichbauer, and Zahilay:

This week, Judge Jim Rogers and 36 other Superior Court judges and court commissioners wrote a letter demanding the immediate closure of City Hall Park, where a number of unhoused people currently live. Unfortunately, acting on this demand will not achieve the aim of improved public safety or be consistent with the evidence of what works best for people living unsheltered and for the broader community. The blunt action of a park closure further disregards the collaborative efforts underway to assist the people residing in the park with finding more appropriate and supportive settings. It is emblematic of a criminal legal system that spends millions of dollars arresting and imprisoning our most vulnerable community members, destabilizes their lives, and makes it harder for them to access the support, health care, and shelter they so badly need.

In recent years, two things have become well established: first, that people who are living homeless want and will accept better situations than remaining unsheltered; and second, that dispersal of encampments without adequate resources provided just leads to other encampments emerging nearby, sometimes in even more precarious and unsafe circumstances for people who are unsheltered and for the broader community of housed residents, workers, and visitors.

More effective strategies are available to address the unacceptable living conditions and support needs of people living at City Hall Park. Experienced, respected regional outreach providers, including REACH, DESC's HOST, and other special population focused teams, have been engaging people in City Hall Park for many months. Given the prevalence and severity of the disabling conditions and other challenges of the people residing there, most require significant planning and enhanced resources to move indoors. Additional resources have recently been established that should provide more significant relief: The City of Seattle just established a new Behavioral Health Response Team, operated by DESC, and King County is poised to expand JustCARE outreach services and emergency hotel housing to people residing in City Hall Park.

Closing the park without providing better shelter and services for its residents will only worsen their problems. They will find themselves displaced from the area and severed from any channels of support they have established—there may not be any area of the city as dense with

social service providers as the blocks around the park—and, inevitably, subject to arrests and additional exposure to the criminal legal system.

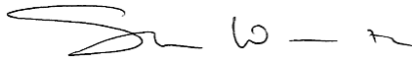
Working with the partners who have practical information, experience, and some resources to address the real and complex needs of the people in the park will yield better, more sustainable solutions for all interested parties.

Seattle and King County badly need housing, as the presence of encampments and the suffering of our unhoused neighbors demonstrate. The County Council is currently considering a \$30 million investment in the criminal legal system. We should invest in housing and services to address our most vulnerable community members' unmet needs. The judges of Superior Court, who see the results of these unmet needs daily inside and outside of their courtrooms, should know this as well as anyone.

Sincerely,



Anita Khandelwal
Director, King County Department of Public Defense



Steve Woolworth, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer, Evergreen Treatment Services



Daniel Malone
Executive Director, DESC

Cc:

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Judge LeRoy McCullough
Judge Chad Allred
Judge Sean O'Donnell
Judge Catherine Shaffer
Judge Matthew Williams
Judge Cindi Port
Judge Susan Amini
Judge Andrea Darvas
Judge Michael Ryan
Judge Kristin Richardson
Judge Julie Spector
Judge Michael Scott
Judge Mafe Rajul
Judge Marshall Ferguson

Judge John McHale
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