



## King County Inquest Process Review Committee

*Charter, December 12, 2017*

**Committee Purpose:** The inquest process is unique to King County and has been passed down from one administration to another.

- State law, RCW Chapter 36.24 authorizes coroners' inquests.
- Section 895 of the King County Charter requires an inquest be held to investigate the causes and circumstance of any death involving a member of law enforcement in the performance of their duties.
- King County Code Chapter 2.24 vests the holding of inquests with the County Executive.
- King County Executive Order PHL-7-1-1 (AEO) establishes the policies and procedures for conducting inquests.

The purpose of an inquest is to provide an open public forum, conducted by a neutral decision-maker, to shed light on the facts surrounding a death at the hands of law enforcement. A further purpose is to promote public understanding of those crucial events in our community in which law enforcement takes human life as a part of their official duties. The executive order and procedures for inquest exist to promote this goal. Those documents have been revised at various times in the past, but have not been examined in any significant way since 2001. It is time to look again at these foundational documents to determine if the King County inquest process is meeting the purposes and goals for which it exists.

### Charge

The Inquest Review Committee is charged with reviewing and reexamining the inquest process to determine what, if any, changes could or should be made to improve the process both for the public and the affected parties. Topics worthy of your consideration include:

- The representation of the family of the deceased and whether this can or should be provided for at public expense.
- Clarification about the scope of the inquest and standards of proof. What line can or should be drawn to allow a full exploration of the facts and circumstances without impinging into determinations of civil or criminal wrongdoing?
- The role of the jury to determine whether they are necessary to the core purpose and goal of the inquest.
- The nature and role of the interrogatories should be examined to determine whether that form of fact finding (by the judge or jury) is useful.
- Whether the use of courtrooms and judges to conduct inquests is useful to the core purposes of the inquest and whether alternatives might exist.



**King County**

- The role of the prosecutor in coordinating the transmission of the investigative materials, recommending cases for inquest and serving as an aid to the judge is in the inquest process – especially in light of the prosecutor’s role in determining criminal liability.
- How the inquest fits in with factors outside the authority of the Executive Order establishing inquest procedures, including state law, internal law enforcement agency review, civilian oversight agencies, civil litigation, and criminal charging decisions.
- Are there alternative or parallel processes that would better serve community and the family needs and create for law enforcement a process of reflection that engenders public trust?

## **Committee Structure**

The Committee shall consist of five members. The Executive shall appoint four members to the Committee and those members shall appoint the fifth member.

The Committee shall hold at least three public meetings.

The Committee will issue its report and recommendations in March, 2018.