



King County

Dow Constantine

King County Executive

401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 800

Seattle, WA 98104-1818

206-263-9600 Fax 206-296-0194

TTY Relay: 711

www.kingcounty.gov

September 22, 2014

The Honorable Larry Phillips
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Chair Phillips:

In my State of the County address at White Center Heights Elementary School earlier this year, I announced my intention to deliver on the vision of our Health & Human Services Transformation Plan by defining regional investments in healthy people and communities for the voters to consider in 2015. With transmittal of the 2015-2016 budget today, I am pleased to provide you with a framework for a prevention-oriented regional investment that will allow us to build a more prosperous, equitable King County by assuring that every baby born and every child raised in our community has a strong start in life and enters adulthood ready to succeed.

I thank the Council members for your unanimous support guiding our Health & Human Services Transformation Plan and the work underway with the Youth Action Plan Task Force. That work, along with a large body of scientific evidence, confirms that prevention is the key to ensuring that everyone in our region has the opportunity to thrive and succeed. What happens in early childhood and adolescence shapes health and well-being throughout one's life. Early childhood development programs that have followed people into adulthood show impressive results, and generate returns ranging from \$3 to \$17 for every dollar invested. The earlier we invest, the better the outcomes.

And yet, so much of our current funding is focused on costly, late-stage crisis intervention. Those investments are necessary once crises such as violence, diabetes, and mental illness have already emerged. And while King County has been a national leader in developing innovative alternatives, intervening earlier to address these kinds of crises and their disproportionate impacts on certain communities, the demand for these services is overwhelming our providers and our budgets.

We have the ability to apply the principles of our Transformation Plan to start down a more successful path with our youngest residents now. Rather than continue to face the disparities in outcomes and the escalating social and economic costs associated with crisis intervention, King County can balance our portfolio with new investments in the earliest days of our children's

lives that will prevent many crises from ever occurring. To advance both regional equity and prosperity, we need to prepare young children to be productive, contributing members of our communities – no matter where they live or how much their parents earn.

Over the next several months, I will work collaboratively with you and other community leaders, including representatives from our Transformation Plan and Youth Action Plan Task Force, to forward to the Council in 2015 a “Best Starts for Kids” levy proposal that will focus on three areas:

1. **Pregnancy & Early Childhood:** The latest advances in the science of brain development prove that pregnancy and the first 1,000 days of life offer the greatest return on investment. Healthier moms deliver healthier babies, while toddlers and preschoolers raised in an environment that fosters strong social and emotional connections develop a foundation for lifelong health, educational success, and well-being.
2. **School-Aged Children & Youth:** Brains continue to develop and lifelong habits are formed throughout one’s youth. Positive family and social relationships support positive development. Targeted interventions to promote health and well-being can prevent physical and behavioral issues from emerging, and quickly identifying and intervening at the first sign of such problems produces the best outcomes.
3. **Communities of Opportunity:** For children to be healthy and succeed, the communities in which they are raised must also be healthy. We have an opportunity to build on our Transformation Plan’s place-based strategy, which has developed into an innovative co-designed partnership with The Seattle Foundation and other community partners, to create environments that improve outcomes for King County’s children and families.

Exciting new work is underway across the country, Washington State, and our region to apply the science of early childhood development to investments in young children and youth. I look forward to working with you and our community partners in developing the specifics of this proposal and engaging our region in this work.

My staff will be in contact with your offices to get your input and follow up with additional information. In the meantime, if you have any questions regarding this Best Starts for Kids framework, please have your staff contact Carrie S. Cihak, my Chief of Policy, at (206) 263-9634.

The Honorable Larry Phillips
September 22, 2014
Page 3

King County's ability to remain prosperous as a region, and achieve our vision of equity and opportunity for all, requires that we increase our investments in prevention, and thereby in the earliest days of our children's lives. Like you, I am committed to improving the outcomes and quality of life for children and families in King County and ask for your support in this important effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dow Constantine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dow Constantine
King County Executive

cc: King County Councilmembers