



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

May 13, 2010

The Honorable Linda Kochmar
Mayor, City of Federal Way
P.O. Box 9718
Federal Way, WA 98063-9718

Dear Mayor Kochmar:

I am writing to ask your support for launching a regional jail planning and management group. This proposal, which emerged from discussions with the North/East Cities (NEC) Oversight Group, is to create a collaborative forum to address our shared interests to utilize existing current jail capacity efficiently and effectively and to plan for our region's jail capacity into the future.

Before highlighting this approach, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts by cities to meet their misdemeanor jail capacity needs. In particular, the member cities of the South Correctional Entity (SCORE)—Auburn, Burien, Des Moines, Federal Way, Renton, SeaTac, and Tukwila—have tackled the difficult challenges of jail planning and operations. Through your leadership, the misdemeanor jail facility being built by SCORE will meet the jail needs of its members and help reduce pressure on the region's jail capacity.

Two other factors have improved prospects for meeting the region's jail needs. First, the jail populations housed King County facilities have dropped over the past two years. Second, cities have more contracting options for jail beds. The NEC Oversight Group and my staff reviewed these factors and concluded that there was a strong likelihood that both King County's and NEC's jail needs could be accommodated through 2020 without constructing additional jail capacity at this time.

However, this conclusion is not a certainty. As a region, we all face similar risks and uncertainties about the jail population and capacity when looking ten years or more into the future. Given recent history, one risk is the difficulty in predicting fluctuations in jail population and forecasting long term trends. Additionally, external drivers beyond our control (such as actions of the state Legislature) can significantly impact jail population. We also continue to face risks to existing jail capacity with the chance of flooding in the Green River Valley and with King County's aging detention facility in downtown Seattle. Regardless of these risks, as a region, we share similar interests in ensuring sufficient jail capacity over the long term to meet the needs of law enforcement and the courts.

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King County's aging detention facility in downtown Seattle. Regardless of these risks, as a region, we share similar interests in ensuring sufficient jail capacity over the long term to meet the needs of law enforcement and the courts.

To mitigate these risks and plan effectively for the future, I am proposing that the county and the cities together form a regional jail planning and management group consisting of entities operating jails in the county and cities using contracted jail capacity. This group would focus on fostering a well-coordinated system of jails in the county, utilizing the region's jail capacity effectively and efficiently, developing periodic reports on trends in the region's jail population and capacity utilization, and cooperatively meeting the region's long-term jail capacity needs. In particular, given the long lead time to plan and build new jail capacity, this group should play a critical role in anticipating the need to expand jail capacity and being prepared to initiate the planning process at the earliest sign of this need.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. It is being offered in the spirit of recognizing SCORE's vital role in the region and our shared public safety interests. I hope you share my belief that we have an opportunity to put in place concrete steps for managing the region's jail system and needs into the future. If you support the approach proposed in this letter, I would ask that you respond in writing by June 30, 2010. If you have questions, please contact Hikari Tamura, Interim Director, Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention.

Sincerely,



Dow Constantine
King County Executive

cc: Hikari Tamura, Interim Director, Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention
Carrie Cihak, Strategic Initiatives Director, Office of King County Executive