



South King County Mayors Frustrated with Rise in Crime and Violence

August 4, 2022 - The mayors of the South King County cities of Auburn, Black Diamond, Enumclaw, Federal Way, Kent, Pacific, Renton, and Tukwila are united in our ongoing plea to our King County and Washington state criminal justice partners to help us stem the rising tide of crime and violence in our communities. King County cities are seeing a disturbing rise in violent crime, as well as drug offenses and property crimes including auto thefts, burglaries, and robberies. Our community of residents, businesses, and visitors – the victims of these crimes – are fed up and action is necessary.

The rise in crime coincides with a number of events, including:

- The passage of SB 5476 which, in answer to the Washington State Supreme Court decision in *State v. Blake*, prevents cities and counties from charging a person with drug possession unless the person is allowed non-mandatory self-directed drug treatment for the first two offenses. Yet, there is no incentive or consequence that encourages addicted users to get into treatment, there is an insufficient system to support the addicted, and if they wanted to get into treatment, it is unavailable or too expensive.
- An influx of more addictive methamphetamine and a flood of fentanyl – both of which are significantly contributing to mental health issues, an increase in violence and property crimes, and death. Dealers of illicit drugs are engaged in a violent drug turf war, and users often commit property crime to sustain their addiction.
- The passage of HB 1054 which, with the exception of DUI cases, made it unlawful for officers to engage in a vehicle pursuit when they have reasonable suspicion that a person in the vehicle has committed a criminal offense. Many offenders are aware of the law, and cases where offenders elude police are on the rise.
- A juvenile and felony criminal justice system in which it takes many months, if not years, for criminal charges to be filed, resolved, or tried.
- A felony prosecution system in which felony filing standards for various crimes are higher than the standards set by state law resulting in many crimes being filed as misdemeanors or not filed at all. These standards are established with insufficient input by the Cities whose communities are impacted.
- A felony prosecution system where juveniles and soon adults have their criminal charges deferred, yet treatment and restorative justice programs required of participants are difficult to find, are accompanied by costs that price low-income offenders out of programs, and there is limited accountability for failures in program compliance.
- A King County Jail system that does not allow for booking of felony suspects on a routine basis. The Norm Maleng Regional Justice Center in Kent no longer permits police department bookings. Moreover, there are times where the Seattle Justice Center is closed to booking or the booking process takes hours. In the best of circumstances, South King County police officers spend hours not responding to crimes, but instead transporting and booking suspects. In the worst circumstances, there are times when officers have nowhere to book felons.

While South King County agencies have been leveraging their city-level resources to prosecute misdemeanor adult crimes – misdemeanor adult crimes are the only crimes that cities have jurisdiction to prosecute – there is a need for improved and timely juvenile and adult felony criminal accountability at the County level.

The Cities support many criminal justice reform efforts, and the safety of everyone in our diverse communities remains of paramount importance. And while the Cities support efforts to reform criminals and stop the revolving door of incarceration by treating the underlying conditions that lead to criminal activity, services must be available and proven, must be accompanied by real consequences for failure, must be equitably available, and the safety of the community must be the most important consideration. The protection of the health, safety and welfare of the community is the very purpose of government.



We have had numerous meetings with the offices of the King County Executive and Prosecutor, as well as state legislators and others with hopes for collaboration and problem solving to reach better outcomes. Those efforts are ongoing, but the consequences of the challenges to our system are real and immediate. Police officers are reporting an alarming trend of criminals who know the laws and exploit them to their advantage. With a lack of immediate accountability aimed squarely at protecting the community, the Cities are faced with a seemingly insurmountable problem. For the Cities' part, they will continue to:

- Respond to calls for police service and prosecute matters within their jurisdiction (adult misdemeanor offenses) to the fullest extent possible.
- Continue to refer juvenile and felony cases to the King County Prosecutor for filing and continue to work with the King County Prosecutor's Office and Executive with regards to juvenile and felony prosecution as well as incarceration to ensure, to the highest degree possible, public safety in an environment of police services centered on safety and accountability takes precedence over all else.
- Lobby state representatives to pass safety-centric laws aimed at protecting the community through safe and accountable police conduct, swift offender accountability accompanied by required and available treatment, as well as laws that recognize that controlled substances are ravishing our community and cannot be tolerated.
- Continue to work with the state to adequately fund and make available accessible mental health treatment and drug addiction services for those who wish to access them, as well as treatment for those incarcerated.

The Cities have implemented the changes set forth in the numerous police reform bills passed in Washington. The Cities now call on the County and State to take immediate measures to address the toll that increases in crime are taking on our community members. Young people are dying or are being injured in the streets, public spaces are being destroyed, and the homes, businesses, and belongings our community members have worked for are at continual risk of loss. Our Cities are publicly announcing that we stand ready to partner in the healing and safety of our community.

Nancy Backus, Auburn

Carol Benson, Black Diamond

Jan Molinaro, Enumclaw

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