



King County

Department of Adult
and Juvenile Detention
Director's Office

March 30, 2020

TO: ACLU Washington
Columbia Legal Services
Disability Rights Washington
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
Northwest Community Bail Fund

FROM: John Diaz, Director

RE: Minimizing COVID-19 pandemic risks in King County jails

On behalf of King County Executive Dow Constantine, I want to thank you for your thoughtful, informed recommendations to ensure everyone's health and safety at correctional facilities during the COVID-19 epidemic. In fact, we are already taking many of the actions you recommend.

At the direction of Executive Constantine, we are working with our partners in the criminal justice system – courts, King County Department of Public Defense, King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, state Department of Corrections, and law enforcement – to quickly decrease the number of people who are in custody so our staff can promote social distance as recommended by Public Health – Seattle & King County.

We have already decreased the adult population by more than 500 over the past few weeks, from 1,940 on March 1st to 1,434 on March 26th and are taking new actions that will further decrease the average daily population.

Our goal is to quickly decrease the adult population so we can offer single cells to each person in custody as recommended by Public Health. Here are the actions we are taking to achieve that goal:

- On March 24th, Executive Constantine signed an Executive Order suspending our Work Release Program.

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- We are not accepting people brought in for misdemeanor charges, except for misdemeanor assaults, violations of no contact or protection orders, DUIs, sex crimes or other charges which present a serious public safety concern.
- We are accepting people booked on felony investigations for now. In the meantime, I have asked all law enforcement to prioritize bookings for those who pose an imminent risk to public safety.
- We are delaying all misdemeanor “commitment sentences” until restrictions on public gatherings are lifted. These are court orders that require someone who is not in custody to report to a jail at a later date to serve their sentence. The people who will be impacted are already in the community.
- As of March 17th, we are no longer accepting people who are arrested for violating the terms of their state Department of Corrections community supervision and are returning people who are in county custody back to state custody.

No one in custody has tested positive for COVID-19, though given that this is a pandemic, our staff is taking emergency precautions to ensure everyone’s health and safety.

Here are some of the emergency actions King County has taken so far:

- Cancelling public visitations and offering video visits at no costs to users.
- Transferring anyone in custody who is not symptomatic but is at a higher risk for severe complications from COVID-19 – 60 or older who also have underlying health conditions – to a housing unit at the Maleng Regional Justice Center, which is more conducive to social distancing and infection protection.
- Screening all staff members and professional visitors – such as attorneys – when they arrive at correctional facilities.
- Increased cleaning at all correctional facilities.
- Providing everyone in custody with cleaning products in their cells – all of which have a sink and soap – and constantly reinforcing Public Health’s messaging to frequently wash their hands.

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- Enhanced screening in pre-booking areas with Jail Health Services employees conducting further evaluations if someone exhibits symptoms before booking begins.

Given the extraordinary circumstances of this pandemic, we will continue to provide proper care or find the safest alternative to incarceration as quickly and safely as possible.

We set up an Incident Command Center to guide this work and will continue post updates on our website, www.kingcounty.gov/daid.

Thank you for being a strong advocate for the health, safety, and well-being of everyone in our community.