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From: Kristin Hanna <slonelawoffices@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, December 28, 2022 10:00 AM

To: Mardi Solomon <mardi@crossroads.pro>; Holly O'Neil <holly@crossroads.pro>; Cathy Halka <CHalka@co.whatcom.wa.us>

Subject: Govt Accountability and Diversion Programs

Esteemed facilitators:

My dad just emailed me this short Seattle Times editorial that touches on some of the same issues that we face here in Whatcom County. It's a short read, and not burdensome.

Some of the criticisms here can help us to anticipate and soften some of the criticisms we will inevitably face.

The editorial is so relevant and timely to our SAC work. I didn't want to email it to the others (and risk overwhelm) without your input. Yet if you feel others in the VVG subcommittee could benefit, please forward it.

May lessons from King County raise the bar for our own justice project here in Whatcom County.

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Warmest regards,

Kristin Hanna

Sent from my iPhone

JAIL DIVERSION PROGRAMS NEED MORE ACCOUNTABILITY

A King County Auditor's report on programs that offer alternatives to jail for people who have run afoul of the law highlights a fractured system without accountability.

There is no way to tell if officials' promises are truly being kept.

What's worse, the Auditor's Office determined the buck passing is found across departments and agencies, with little urgency to do better.

In the public safety debate, police accountability and staffing have taken center stage.

But just as important are programs designed to resolve longstanding problems with detention, such as recidivism and racial disparities.

Public officials ought to work across jurisdictional boundaries to ensure actions follow rhetoric.

In the Dec. 13 report, the County Auditor examined 12 programs that divert people from jail or provide an alternative to incarceration. The intent is to reduce the numbers of people in detention and address causes of criminal behavior.

Overall, King County budgets more than \$26 million for these programs.

The average daily population in King County jails stood at 1,900 in January 2020.

Booking restrictions during the pandemic dropped it to just below 1,300. It is now about 1,500. In documents provided to the editorial board under a public-records request, Seattle Police Department officials reported that the pandemic booking restrictions "impacted SPD's ability to keep the community safe ..."

The criminal legal system has overlapping responsibilities.

The Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention is under the King County Executive.

The King County Prosecuting Attorney is separately elected.

Same with judges in superior and district court. All of them touch diversion and alternative sentencing programs.

The audit determined that some programs are evaluated, but others — including one that has been going for 20 years — are left pretty much alone.

"This means the County lacks information on whether all programs are working as intended or if improvements could better serve people and meet county goals," the report stated.

This is not a new issue, according to the auditor.

"In 2002, the County Council and the County Executive at the time emphasized the key role incarceration alternative programs have in reducing jail populations and recidivism," the report stated. "However, county leaders have not articulated how incarceration alternative programs contribute to county goals or how leaders intend to include incarceration alternative programs in their actions to meet those goals."

The county needs to monitor and evaluate each jail alternative and diversion program.

Players across the criminal legal system must communicate more effectively, even taking into account that separate branches of government, district and superior court should get directly involved.

After all, judges determine who enters many of these programs.

Public safety cannot function properly without effective alternatives to detention. It's past time these programs receive attention and monitoring with an urgency commensurate with their community importance.