

King County leaders propose Youth Action Plan

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Together with his colleagues, Metropolitan King County Councilmember Rod Dembowski today introduced a proposal calling for the development of a Youth Action Plan to ensure that young people in King County have access to the resources and opportunities they need to become productive adults.

“As a kid growing up here, King County played an important role in my life. I played in our county parks, and received health care at our Public Health clinics. Today’s kids deserve our best efforts to ensure that they have every opportunity to grow up healthy, safe, and succeed in life,” said Dembowski. “This legislation brings together the broad spectrum of participants from throughout the region who help King County’s children and youth to recommit our collective efforts and honor our obligations as adults to the next generation. I look forward to working with these leaders to reform, renew and reinvest in our work to help King County’s kids achieve their full potential.”

“Economic stability, reliable health care, and a wide range of educational choices for all our youth are critical components for a healthy, livable community,” said Council Vice Chair Jane Hague. “It’s exciting to know that some of the most committed public servants in King County will be working to ensure that all our children have the opportunity to seek their full potential.”

“Helping our youth realize their full potential is one of the best investments a society can make,” said Councilmember Larry Phillips. “King County services can make a difference in the lives of our youth, and developing a youth action plan can help us deliver those services more effectively.”

Over the last 50 years, King County has been a leader in supporting programs for children, youth and young adults – including developing sports fields in local neighborhoods, providing public health visits for low-income infants and children, establishing a Youth & Family Services Network to help at-risk teens and families, and assisting youth who have become involved with the criminal justice system to take a fresh path. However, the Great Recession reduced or eliminated County support for many programs, and the programs still receiving County funding are operated through many different agencies, too often with little coordination between them.

As part of an initiative adopted by the Council last year, a countywide task force has worked to develop a plan for an accountable and integrated delivery of social safety net services in King County. The Youth Action Plan proposal introduced by Councilmember Dembowski builds on that work.

The goal of the Youth Action Plan legislation is to ensure that King County’s Strategic Plan objective to “promote opportunities for all communities and individuals to realize their full potential,” is applied to the County’s young people and reflected across all County departments, programs and initiatives. The plan also seeks to ensure that King County is a strong partner with the state, cities, private sector, non-profit and philanthropic organizations.

“Our youth are the future leaders of King County,” said Reagan Dunn. “Creating a Youth Plan is a sensible approach that will better serve the needs of children throughout the county.”

The proposed legislation calls for the creation of a broadly-based task force to develop a Youth Action Plan that would include the following elements:

- Mission, vision, and defined outcomes that enable the County to advance its Strategic Plan and social justice and equity goals,
- A Bill of Rights for Youth,
- Whether a single point of accountability should be established to lead the County’s Youth Agenda and if so, its form, role and duties,
- Identification of reform efforts and efficiencies and recommendations to overcoming barriers to success,
- Prioritization of programs and methodologies and recommendations related to funding,

- Evaluation and reporting structure and implementation timeline.

The proposal calls on the County Executive to appoint members to a Youth Action Plan Task Force. The members of the task force would include elected officials, leaders from Seattle and suburban cities, and non-profit community partners that serve infants, children, youth and young adults. It would be charged with conducting information meetings with community members, stakeholders and consumers to keep interested parties informed on the development of the Plan.

The Youth Action Task Force is charged with preparing a Youth Action Plan for the King County Council by September 4, 2014.

The legislation has broad support. All nine members of the Council have signed on as sponsors, and it has garnered praise from cities, law enforcement, the courts, state leaders and human service providers.

“The Sheriff’s Office is proud to participate in King County’s Youth Action Plan,” said **King County Sheriff John Urquhart**. “Devoting more attention and resources to our youth will pay dividends in the long run by helping them to succeed and keeping kids out of the criminal justice system.”

“As a former member of the King County Children and Families Commission, I am pleased to see King County leaders renewing their commitment to focusing on our community’s children and youth,” said **State Representative Ruth Kagi, Chair of the House Early Learning and Human Services Committee**. “The proposed legislation offers fresh hope for prioritization and investment in our kids, and I urge the Council’s quick passage.”

“Whether they live in Renton or Redmond, Kent or Kenmore, Shoreline or Seattle-all our kids deserve the same opportunities to succeed,” said **Renton Mayor Denis Law, President of the Sound Cities Association**. “I applaud Councilmember Dembowski for his leadership, and our cities look forward to working with him to make a difference on behalf of kids throughout King County.”

“Our county has long born the costs of young people who struggle. They show up in our juvenile system, our prisons, our emergency rooms, and yes, even at my shelter,” said **Kristine Cunningham, Executive Director** of Rising Out of the Shadows (ROOTS), an agency that provides shelter and other essential services to homeless young adults. “This County Council ordinance reflects a desire to look at whole systems and create accountability with the young people in mind. I see this as a new, exciting perspective shift in effective policy making.”

“The success of our community is directly linked to the success of our kids,” said **King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg**. “This proposal will help coordinate multiple efforts designed to help young people grow up healthy, safe and smart.”

“This opportunity to improve services offered to our youth, including those involved in our criminal justice and dependency systems, is invaluable,” said the **Hon. Richard McDermott, Presiding Judge, King County Superior Court**. “Creation of the Youth Action Plan Task Force, and the development of a Youth Action Plan, fills a significant need here in King County. We have no more valuable resource in our community than our youth. We thank the Council for this progressive and much needed plan.”

“When our cities partner with the County, we get results,” said **Auburn Mayor Pete Lewis, Vice Chair of the County Council’s Regional Policy Committee**. “I was proud to be a part of our successful effort to bring needed services to veterans. Just as we owe a debt of gratitude to the veterans who served us in the past, we owe it to future generations to invest in our kids today.”

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