



**Department of
PUBLIC DEFENSE**

*Upholding the Constitution,
one client at a time.*

**Anita Khandelwal
Interim Director of Public Defense**

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July 16, 2018

The Honorable Dow Constantine
King County Executive
401 5th Avenue, Room 800
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Executive Constantine:

The King County Department of Public Defense and the Washington Defender Association oppose the incarceration of young people in any facility--the current one or the new one. We share the community, city, and county's commitment to zero youth detention.

Juvenile jails and prisons traumatize young people and make communities less safe. When young people are incarcerated they are ripped away from their homes, schools, and communities. Without those supports, young people develop higher rates of mental illness and are more likely to be involved with the criminal legal system. Those harms disproportionately fall on young people of color, who make up more than 80 percent of the young people incarcerated in King County. Rather than being locked up, young people should be supported in their community.

The decrepit nature of the current facility and the need to renovate it are beyond question, but the construction of a new jail makes incarcerating young people no less harmful. We should not, however, let the question of a building--new or old--distract us from focusing on a key driver of youth detention: prosecutorial practices. While we have seen the King County prosecutor's office divert cases, we have also seen that office seek convictions when diversion would meet the needs of the young people and the community. We have also seen the prosecutor's office increase or add charges and request longer sentences when a young person exercises their right to go to trial.

The recent outcry over the separation of immigrant children from their parents has raised public awareness of the trauma this practice creates. The young people we represent are no less traumatized when separated from their parents. We ask that local elected officials show these young people the same compassion they do towards young people traumatized by the Trump administration's practices.



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The King County Department of Public Defense and the Washington Defender Association fight every day to prevent the incarceration of young people. We are excited to partner with all who oppose the incarceration of young people and to work together towards a just and compassionate future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anita Khandelwal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Anita Khandelwal
Interim Director of Public Defense

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christie Hedman". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Christie Hedman
Executive Director, Washington Defender Association