



KING COUNTY CORRECTIONS GUILD

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Closing Kent RJC Jail to Inmate Booking and Cutting Jail Staff Will Endanger Public Safety

Proposed Budget Cuts Will Take Police Off the Streets and Make Our Jails Unsafe

The King County Corrections Guild today expressed its strong opposition to the dangerous cuts included in the proposed 2011 budget. The budget transmitted to the Council today would close inmate bookings at the Maleng RJC jail in Kent, forcing police officers from south King County to transport prisoners into downtown Seattle, and eliminates over 30 vacant Corrections Officer positions, increasing pressure on a jail system that is already understaffed.

“These cuts go too far,” said Doug Justus, President of the King County Corrections Guild. “We all hope the voters will approve new revenue for public safety in November, but the Council must restore these cuts, regardless of the voters’ decision.”

Closing the Maleng RJC Jail to Bookings

- In 1992, the voters of King County approved a bond measure to build the Regional Justice Center in Kent. One of the key promises made by the county to the cities and citizens of south King County was that King County Sheriff’s deputies and local police would be able to book prisoners in Kent, avoiding the

long drives to Seattle. **We must honor that promise.** Especially with reduced staffing levels, police should be patrolling neighborhoods, not wasting time stuck in traffic on I-5.

- **Forcing all bookings into the downtown jail will make our system far less efficient and will probably not save the county any money!** The downtown Seattle intake system will be overwhelmed, reducing security. More staff will be needed to transport prisoners from Seattle back to Kent after they are booked. When this option was proposed in the 2009 budget, the Council rejected it because it would make our entire system less efficient and would not result in a savings to the county.

Cutting Jail Staff Positions

- While jail populations are currently lower than projected, King County's jail system remains understaffed. **Our officers routinely work hundreds of hours of overtime every month.** Without the extensive use of voluntary overtime King County could not operate its jails. Under this proposal, if jail populations increase at all, high levels of **mandatory overtime** will return. We would remind the Council that under our new labor agreement, the costs of mandatory overtime to the county are higher than the costs of hiring new officers.
- While the secure detention levels overall are below capacity, **we are currently well over capacity in regards to inmates with psychiatric problems.** (118% of capacity regarding psychiatric inmates on September 22 of this year) Psychiatric inmates require more supervision and monitoring, and we are concerned that **at current staffing levels we are not able to properly monitor these inmates now.** Cutting staff will further impair our ability to monitor these inmates and prevent suicides.
- We disagree strongly with the decisions made throughout the region which have led to more criminals being outside of secure detention. **Given the realities of the budget, however, last year the Executive and Council agreed to not fill vacant Corrections Officer positions, yet retain FTE authority for those positions.** We believe that would again be a responsible step to control costs without placing public safety at risk.