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Title: Breaking the Cycle

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Sponsoring Agency: King County Executive Office



King County

WHEREAS, Executive Zahilay has established the *4 Bs for a Better Future*—Breaking the Cycle, Building for Affordability, Be in Community, and Better Government—as the guiding priorities of this administration; and

WHEREAS, the *Breaking the Cycle* priority recognizes that homelessness, untreated behavioral health needs, and repeated legal-system involvement are interconnected challenges that require urgent, coordinated, and housing-centered solutions; and

WHEREAS, these challenges are deeply interconnected and cannot be effectively addressed by any single department, program, provider, or level of government acting alone; and

WHEREAS, the expiration of pandemic-era federal funding and the loss of other federal support requires King County to act swiftly, collaboratively, and strategically to prevent further harm and system collapse; and

WHEREAS, fragmentation and siloed decision-making across housing, behavioral health, emergency response, and the criminal legal system result in inefficiencies, repeated system involvement, and preventable harm; and

WHEREAS, King County continues to face an urgent homelessness crisis requiring immediate expansion of affordable housing options; and

WHEREAS, King County has created valuable relationships with private and public partners, and the county should cultivate those partnerships to leverage all available funds to stabilize our housing systems; and

WHEREAS, *Breaking the Cycle* requires accelerated decision making and implementation with transparent and frequent communication with partners and the public; cross-system coordination focused on immediate stabilization and long-term recovery; and

WHEREAS, effective affordable housing must be paired with behavioral health, housing stabilization, and reentry support in order to break cycles of homelessness, crisis, and system involvement; and

WHEREAS, the King County Executive has authority under Article 3 of the King County Charter to direct the administration of executive departments and coordinate intergovernmental action;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Girmay Zahilay, King County Executive, do hereby order and direct:

Section 1. Establishing the Breaking the Cycle Initiative

The Breaking the Cycle Initiative (“Initiative”) is hereby established to treat the interconnected crises of homelessness, addiction, and behavioral health challenges and to align housing, health, and criminal legal systems and related funding to truly break the cycling through systems like emergency rooms, jails, living unhoused and improve outcomes. The Initiative refers to the efforts in Sections 2-7 of this order.

Section 2. Forming the Breaking the Cycle Workgroup

The Executive Office shall convene a cross-sector and intergovernmental *Breaking the Cycle* Workgroup to further develop policy, structural and funding recommendations to improve outcomes and coordination in the homelessness, addiction, behavioral health and incarceration continuum. The workgroup will examine the components of the continuum that are working, that are not working as intended, and where resources are not producing desired outcomes. The workgroup will also document siloed practices that hinder performance and continuity of care, including any data, regulatory and operational barriers to coordination.

Recommendations developed by the workgroup should include policies and programs that demonstrably improve outcomes; strategies to shift toward performance-based metrics that prioritize what works; and opportunities to eliminate or restructure ineffective investments.

The workgroup will be co-chaired by the Directors of the Department of Community and Human Services and Department of Public Health – Seattle & King County.

The Workgroup shall include a representative from:

1. Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS)
2. Public Health – Seattle & King County
3. King County Sheriff’s Office
4. King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office
5. Department of Public Defense
6. Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention
7. Jail Health Services
8. Department of Local Services
9. King County Information Technology

The following will also be invited to participate:

10. Representative from King County Council

11. Representative of the King County Superior Court
12. Representative from the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA)
13. Representative from Harborview Medical Center
14. Representatives from homelessness, housing and behavioral health service providers
16. Individuals or organizations representing individuals with housing instability lived experience
17. Representatives from other government, nonprofit, advocacy, civic, and philanthropic partners with expertise, experience or interest in addressing the objectives of this Initiative

The workgroup shall convene within 45 days of this executive order and submit a report to the Executive no later than November 30, 2026. The report shall include strategies and recommendations to identify:

1. Tangible, accelerated ways the county can focus on more cross-system coordination to more effectively deliver behavioral health and crisis stabilization services. The taskforce members will review the feedback from community members and providers from the engagement efforts conducted by DCHS to inform the Mental Illness & Drug Dependency behavioral health sales tax renewal plan. This feedback helps identify the gaps in the behavioral health system and provide recommendations for future policy efforts.
2. Data that exists and data that is needed to better understand the continuity of care from a client perspective.
3. Regulatory and operational barriers that can be removed to improve coordination within the existing systems.
4. Existing pathways to service that produce positive measurable outcomes.
5. Evidence based policy and funding recommendations, including policies and programs that demonstrably improve outcomes; strategies to shift toward performance-based metrics that prioritizes what works; and opportunities to eliminate or restructure ineffective investments.
7. Proposals for County budget investments, along with funding and policy recommendations for city, state and federal partners that present opportunities for braided and blended funding to sustain a coordinated continuum of care.
8. Explore potential County organizational structures to help streamline existing efforts around housing. This sub-workgroup will review existing departments, divisions, or other functions of the County government and explore whether creating a standalone

department of housing or other reorganization/restructuring would help better meet the needs of residents.

Section 3: Establish a Breaking the Cycle Policy Team

The Executive Office shall establish a “breaking the cycle” policy team in the Executive Office that will work closely with the workgroup created in Section 2 of this order. In addition to assisting the workgroup, the policy advisors will monitor the implementation of the recommendations emerging from the workgroup. The policy team will consist of the following positions:

- Behavioral & Public Health lead advisor
- Public Safety lead advisor
- Housing & Homelessness lead advisor

Section 4: Use data to drive results

KCIT, who oversees the integrated health data hub, in partnership with DCHS and other departments, shall report to the workgroup outlined in Section 2 what data exists to assess needs across the housing, health, crisis response and criminal legal systems. The data will assess where the gaps in care exist and, using existing research such as the 2023 Criminal Justice Enterprise Data report previously submitted to the King County Council, a review of existing constraints and recommendations that could help better integrate data across different systems. The County will also work towards performance-based evaluations and measures that can, where possible, be integrated into existing grants-funded services to measure outcomes across multiple systems, particularly where those measures may not exist currently.

Section 5. Open 500 Units of Supportive Housing in 500 Days

The Executive Office shall work with DCHS, KCRHA and others to ensure the completion of five hundred units of subsidized housing units across the county within the next five hundred days. The units should primarily be emergency shelter units, low- and moderate-income housing units, and permanent supportive housing units that provide critical behavioral and mental health support. The county should also work to address housing needs that are integrated into other health systems, such as respite bed programs.

The County will identify opportunities for new housing units, including the construction of tiny house villages, and ensure the completion of longer term, supportive housing units. The County will also work to preserve existing units of shelter and housing, to not lose ground on what we currently have.

Section 6. Activate Underutilized Properties Suitable for Housing

All executive branch departments shall cooperate in the creation of a comprehensive inventory of underutilized properties that may be suitable for different types of housing, including but not limited to:

- County-owned land and buildings;
- Properties under long-term lease or operational control by the County; and
- Sites suitable for temporary or interim use, including tiny house villages, modular shelters, or congregate emergency shelters.

The Department of Executive Services shall lead this inventory effort in coordination with DCHS. DCHS will assess the properties' suitability for housing and, where possible, estimate development costs for a range of affordable housing options for the properties. When options are identified, the county will work closely with city partners, KCRHA and others to seek investments for the siting, operations and maintenance of emergency shelter units, and other types of housing units.

Section 7: Explore a dedicated revenue source to address the Housing and Homelessness Crisis

As part of the Breaking the Cycle Workgroup, the Executive Office shall convene a second and distinct workgroup to explore a dedicated revenue source, including a county-wide housing levy, to support the building, siting, preservation, maintenance, and operations of emergency shelter and affordable housing in King County. The need for housing is pressing and urgent across the county, especially housing that is affordable to very low-income households, those experiencing homelessness and housing instability, and housing that supports the behavioral health needs of people who need it the most.

The Executive's office shall convene this workgroup made up of governmental, community-based organizations, private sector, philanthropic, homebuilders, impacted communities and labor partners to identify and recommend a dedicated revenue source to build, site and operate emergency shelter and affordable housing units in King County.

The workgroup will convene within 60 days of the effective date of this Executive Order and deliver its findings to the Executive. By December 31, 2026, the workgroup shall submit a final report and recommendation to the Executive. DCHS will assist the workgroup in the formation of recommendations.

Dated and effective this 31st day of March 2026.



Girmay Zahilay
King County Executive

Attest:

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Norm Alberg
Director, Records and Licensing Services Division, Department of Executive Services