



King County

KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

JUNE 10, 2025

Cyber Resilience Performance Audit

TO:

Metropolitan
King County
Councilmembers

FROM:

KyMBER Waltmunson,
County Auditor

County governments are vulnerable to cyberattack

What are cyberattacks? The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) defines a cyberattack as "an attack, via cyberspace, targeting an enterprise's use of cyberspace for the purpose of disrupting, disabling, destroying, or maliciously controlling a computing environment/infrastructure; or destroying the integrity of the data or stealing controlled information." In short, it is a malicious or unauthorized activity that aims to access, disrupt, or destroy information systems or the information they hold. For example, an attack could steal data, compromise privacy, or disrupt operations. According to the King County Department of Information Technology, these incidents are common for every organization.

Is King County at risk? King County's Office of Risk Management says it is very likely for King County to experience a significant electronic security breach within the next five years. In recent years, cyberattacks have affected many local government agencies, in some cases causing tens of millions of dollars in damages and widespread system outages.

Audit scope and objectives

We conducted a performance audit of cybersecurity with a focus on one county agency. Our scope included King County Information Technology (KCIT) and other agency roles, responsibilities, and processes meant to ensure that King County detects and responds to cyber incidents quickly and effectively. The audit examined the County's organizational structure as it relates to KCIT's information technology (IT) security and privacy function, development of county cybersecurity policies, current cybersecurity practices, and processes for

identifying, addressing, and responding to cybersecurity threats. The objectives of this audit were to understand:

- To what extent does King County’s current IT governance support effective cybersecurity threat assessment, risk prioritization, and incident detection and response, consistent with leading cybersecurity practices?
- To what extent are King County cybersecurity activities consistent with leading cybersecurity practices — specifically regarding risk assessment and response, threat assessment and monitoring, and incident detection and response?

Audit findings

Our findings related to county IT security and infrastructure are exempt from public disclosure under RCW 42.56.420(4). As a result, this letter does not include details on our findings or specify the agencies involved in the audit. We identified areas of risk where King County could improve governance and processes around cybersecurity, and we communicated our findings and recommendations to relevant stakeholders in a confidential report. The Auditor’s Office will follow up on audit recommendations to ensure that they are implemented.

Justin Anderson and Ben Thompson conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor’s Office at 206-477-1033 or KCAO@KingCounty.gov.

Advancing Performance & Accountability

KYMBER WALTMUNSON, KING COUNTY AUDITOR

MISSION Improve government performance, accountability, and transparency by providing impactful, independent analyses

VALUES INDEPENDENCE • CREDIBILITY • IMPACT

The King County Auditor's Office is committed to equity, social justice, and ensuring that King County is an accountable, inclusive, and anti-racist government.

While planning our work, we develop research questions that aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of King County government and to identify and help dismantle systemic racism. In analysis we strive to ensure that communities referenced are seen, not erased. We promote aligning King County data collection, storage, and categorization with just practices. We endeavor to use terms that are respectful, representative, and people- and community-centered, recognizing that inclusive language continues to evolve. For more information, see the King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan, King County's statement on racial justice, and the King County [Auditor's Office Strategic Plan](#).

ABOUT US The King County Auditor's Office was created by charter in 1969 as an independent agency within the legislative branch of county government. The office conducts oversight of county government through independent audits, capital projects oversight, and other studies. The results of this work are presented to the Metropolitan King County Council and are communicated to the King County Executive and the public. The King County Auditor's Office performs its work in accordance with Government Auditing Standards.



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