King County

Office of Law Enforcement Oversight (OLEO)

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Supporting safe, accessible public assemblies: OLEO recommends updates to King County Sheriff's crowd management policies

King County's Office of Law Enforcement Oversight (OLEO) on Thursday issued 18 new recommendations in a memo to the King County Sheriff's Office (Sheriff's Office) to improve its policies and practices for crowd-management situations, including demonstrations, sporting events, and large gatherings. The recommendations focus on clarifying the role and responsibilities of the Rapid Deployment Force, the Sheriff's Office's crowd management unit; revising approved crowd control tactics to minimize harm to community members; and implementing practices to improve transparency and accountability throughout crowd management situations.

To complete this review, OLEO analyzed the Sheriff's Office's current crowd management policies and practices, participated in Sheriff's Office working groups and trainings, researched national best practices, and collaborated with organizations throughout King County to better understand community needs. OLEO partnered with the Arc of King County, Eastside For All, Look2Justice, People Power Washington, and Urban Family whose knowledge, lived experiences, and input were an invaluable resource for developing these recommendations.

"The Sheriff's Office has made significant progress in improving its crowd management policies in recent years, but more work remains to ensure those policies are clear, accessible, transparent, and aligned with community needs," said OLEO Director Tamer Abouzeid. "We are grateful to both our community partners and the Sheriff's Office for sharing their expertise with us to shape these recommendations."

OLEO's recommendations build upon new crowd management policies published by the Sheriff's Office in 2025 as King County prepared to host the 2026 World Cup. Most large-scale events are peaceful and can require minimal law enforcement involvement. OLEO's recommendations aim to steward relationships between the police and the public and minimize potential harm to community members when law enforcement involvement is required at large events. Several of the recommendations in the memo provide actionable steps for making crowd situations safe, equitable, and accessible.

Historically, crowd management practices are not developed with accessibility and equity in mind — causing preventable harm and fear of law enforcement. OLEO valued working alongside partner organizations, like the Arc of King County, to issue recommendations that aim to ensure disabled demonstrators are afforded the same opportunities to safely exercise their First Amendment rights in King County.

“This is the second set of recommendations that we have developed alongside the OLEO team, and we look forward to the Sheriff’s Office’s response,” said KJ Jones, a representative from Look2Justice, an organization focused on transforming the criminal legal system. “It is crucial that the Sheriff’s Office take action to update their policies on crowd management practices and respond to the needs of King County communities.”

Community-based organizations that are interested in partnering with OLEO to deliver equitable, collaborative recommendations as part of future projects can complete this form or reach out to OLEOpolicy@kingcounty.gov.

Resources: Supporting Safe and Accessible Public Assemblies: Updating the King County Sheriff’s Office’s Crowd Management Policies and Procedures

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