

May 26, 2015

## **CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM**

### **SUBJECT**

Briefing on Proposed King County Levy—"Best Starts for Kids"

### **STAFF CONTACTS**

Joyce Nichols, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, 452-4225  
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Terry Smith, Assistant Director, 452-5379  
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### **POLICY ISSUES**

King County Executive Dow Constantine is proposing the Best Starts for Kids (BSK), a six-year property tax levy for the November 2015 Ballot. At its June 4 meeting, the King County Council is scheduled to consider placing the measure on the countywide ballot. King County staff will attend tonight's meeting and provide an overview of the proposed levy and its uses. The briefing is intended to provide an opportunity for Council to become informed about the proposal, ask questions of staff and give feedback to staff.

Adrienne Quinn, Director of the King County Department of Community and Human Services will provide an informational presentation on the proposed levy. Bellevue staff present will include Emily Leslie, Human Services Manager and Terry Smith, Assistant Director, Parks and Community Services. Terry was appointed as the City of Bellevue representative on the King County Youth Action Plan Task Force.

### **DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**

<u>    </u>	Action
<u>  X  </u>	Discussion
<u>  X  </u>	Information

### **BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**

On April 28, King County Executive Dow Constantine released details of a proposed Best Starts for Kids levy. On April 29, the Executive transmitted an ordinance to the County Council requesting it place the levy on the November 2015 ballot. At its June 4 meeting, the County Council is scheduled to consider placing the measure on the ballot

The strategies proposed by the Executive are aimed at helping every child in King County get off to a strong start in life and reach adulthood healthy and able to reach his or her full potential. As proposed by the Executive, this would be a six-year property tax levy lid-lift at a rate of 14-cents per \$1,000 of assessed value. The levy would raise an estimated \$392 million countywide over its life. The impact to the owner of a house in Bellevue with an assessed value of \$600,000 would be approximately \$84 per year.

### **Rationale for the Levy**

Emerging neuroscience has demonstrated that the first five years are critical for brain development, and brain development (including regions of the brain that govern self-regulation and impulse control) continues through the teen-age years. The idea behind the Best Starts for Kids levy is to strengthen children's early development, invest in programs to support key developmental milestones, and help create healthy communities that will support youth and families.

The goal is that by investing in prevention and early intervention, more costly future problems can be avoided (e.g., substance abuse, mental illness, chronic disease and incarceration). The County currently spends approximately 75% of its General Fund budget supports the law and justice system, and many cities devote a similar percentage of their General Fund budgets to public safety. One goal of the proposed levy is to invest early in children to avoid having to spend these dollars later in life.

### **How the Levy Proposal Was Developed**

King County staff reviewed prevention-oriented science research from difference perspectives. This work focused on inequities and challenges such as mental illness, substance abuse, chronic disease, child abuse/neglect, homelessness, involvement in the justice system, violence and injuries, unemployment and workforce skill gaps. Three advisory panels worked with staff as it investigated programs for children and youth in King County. The three panels included: the Best Starts for Kids Advisory Group; the Youth Action Plan Task Force and the Health and Human Services Transformation Advising Partners Group. Recommendations from these groups helped form many of the policies, goals and programs included in the levy.

### **Governance and Levy Oversight**

The Youth Action Plan Advisory Group recommended that the County establish an advisory board that can assist the Executive and County Council as they consider outcomes, policies and investments for children, families, youth and young adults. The Executive recommended that this body be the advisory board for the levy except for the portion focused on Communities of Opportunity (COO). The Executive recommended that the existing COO governance group serve as the advisory board for the COO portion of the levy. In addition to these advisory boards, the County's Department of Community and Human Services would be accountable for financial oversight and reporting for the levy.

### **What the Levy Proposes to Fund**

The Executive's transmittal letter to the County Council proposes the levy proceeds be allocated as follows:

- 50% would be invested in strategies that focus on children under the age of five, and on pregnant women.
- 35% would be invested in strategies focused on youth ages 5-24.
- 9% would be invested in expanding the Communities of Opportunity partnership between King County and the Seattle Foundation.
- 6% would be devoted to evaluation, data collection and improving service delivery and programs for children, youth and their communities.

Some of the strategies described by the County as "proven and promising" are called out for investments, including:

- Mental health screening for all youth in King County.
- Home visitation for new mothers and families to ensure that babies are healthy.

- Universal access to developmental screening.
- Flexible funding to prevent homelessness for youth and families.
- Programs to increase community health, including increasing access to affordable healthy foods, and making communities more walkable and better connected.

### **Implementation:**

In order to reduce inequities across King County, BSK strategies are designed to be both universal and targeted, with a significant majority of levy funding competitively bid in outcomes-focused contracts to community-based organizations. This will help ensure that the strategies are implemented in a manner that is appropriate for all cultural and ethnic groups and that each child and her caregivers receive the tools and level of support they need. Should the County Council place this measure on the ballot and the voters approve it, the County will refine outcomes and indicators and develop a detailed implementation plan with input and consultation from a variety of stakeholders.

**ALTERNATIVES**            N/A

**RECOMMENDATION**    N/A

### **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Best Starts for Kids - Handout
2. Best Starts for Kids - Staff Report

### **AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL DOCUMENT LIBRARY**

King County Youth Action Plan