



King County
Corrections Guild



January 14, 2022

Dear King County Council, King County Executive Dow Constantine, Seattle City Council, and Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell,

Cc: King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention, King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, King County Department of Public Defense, King County Superior Court, King County District Court, Seattle Municipal Court, Seattle City Attorney's Office, and Media Outlets,

We, the King County Corrections Officers Guild and the SEIU 925-Department of Public Defense Chapter, write to alert you of an imminent and ongoing crisis occurring in our county's jails, located in both Seattle and Kent. For many months, the jails have faced staffing shortages that affected Corrections Officers' abilities to run the jails, and to keep both themselves and the incarcerated persons safe. For months now, public defenders have watched and objected as our ability to meet with and advocate for our incarcerated clients has lessened or, in some cases, halted altogether. But now that Omicron is sweeping through Corrections staff and incarcerated people, these issues have reached a boiling point, leading to both working conditions and conditions of incarceration that are intolerable and unsustainable.

Approximately one-third of the jail is currently in COVID protocols. Of the 1,363 adults currently held in King County Facilities, there are 194 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 243 incarcerated individuals in quarantine. Approximately 50 corrections officers are out sick, with no one left to fill their roles as 100 positions remain vacant. Fear, tension, and confusion are sweeping our jails nearly as quickly as COVID. Corrections officers are sleeping in the jail because they can't get home between a double shift and their next one. Trustees aren't able to work so there is a serious lack of access to fresh meals, timely laundry and commissary to obtain basic supplies. Incarcerated people are being kept in conditions analogous to solitary confinement, with very little time outside of their cells. The availability of attorney-client meeting booths is also limited or delayed due to staff shortages. Staff shortages are so severe that staff aren't always able to maintain proper COVID protocols which further exposes employees and the incarcerated to risk of infection. Nurses report that they are delayed in providing necessary and potentially life-saving medicine.

Incarcerated people have little access to their families, their attorneys, the courts, or any other chance at advocating for their own release. Corrections officers cannot keep working overtime and

double shifts until every one of them gets sick. Defense attorneys cannot keep fighting against a court system that refuses to slow down the process of continuing to incarcerate people. The conditions in the King County jails have reached a point where they are hazardous to everyone who goes there and unconstitutional for everyone held there.

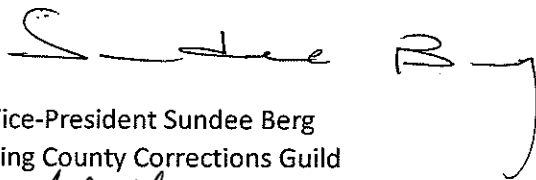
COVID-19 should not be a death sentence for anyone held in a jail or anyone working in a jail. The stark reality is that if no changes are made, people will continue to get sick and continue to suffer. There are easy steps that the County Council, the Executive, the Courts, and the Prosecuting Attorney's Office can make to protect the health and safety of ALL King County residents;

1. Impose immediate booking restrictions so that violent offenses are the only ones booked into County jail facilities.
2. Stop issuing warrants for misdemeanor and non-violent offenses.
3. Immediately take all necessary steps to improve staffing and workplace safety in the jail.
4. Make plans for the immediate release of all misdemeanor and non-violent offenders.

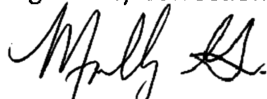
Look no further than the ongoing disaster at Rikers Island in New York City for an example for what can happen when elected officials turn a blind eye to the working and living conditions at the jails they oversee.

It is a historic moment when Correction Officers and Public Defenders stand together. Though we are frequently at odds, we are united in our conviction that safety in our jails is vitally important, and that this current crisis is headed towards a catastrophe. We encourage every person and entity with the ability to act, to do so now, to ensure that our County, our Community, and our Corrections Facilities remain a safe and constitutional space for every citizen of King County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sundee Berg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "B" at the end.

Vice-President Sundee Berg
King County Corrections Guild

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Molly Gilbert". The signature is written in a cursive style.

President Molly Gilbert
SEIU 925, King County Public Defense Chapter