



King County Council Chair Larry Phillips
King County Council Vice Chair Jane Hague; King County Council Vice Chair Joe McDermott
King County Councilmember Rod Dembowski; King County Councilmember Reagan Dunn;
King County Councilmember Larry Gossett; King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert
King County Councilmember Dave Upthegrove; King County Councilmember Pete von Reichbauer

King County Courthouse
516 Third Avenue, Room 1200
Seattle, WA 98104

October 19, 2015

Dear Members of the King County Council:

You have the opportunity and the power to open the doors and bring people inside *tonight*. As you are aware, in Seattle and King County, after our publicly and privately funded shelters are full, thousands of our neighbors still have nowhere safe to rest every night. Our January 2015 One Night Count showed 3,772 people outside between 2.00 a.m. and 5.00 a.m. That was a 21% increase in how many people were counted without shelter during the January 2014 One Night Count. While our long-term work to secure federal, state, and local resources needed to create more affordable housing, and reweave the shredded safety net continues, we face a severe and worsening crisis now.

As we begin planning for the January 2016 One Night Count, it seems all too plausible that we will again see more people in our community who lack the basics needed to survive. Local officials like you can ensure that we have more shelter and assistance to offer to those who need and want it. In the event of a natural disaster, you would direct County employees to deploy all available County resources to ensure safety and health for the public immediately. Today I urge you to work to open the vacant, county-owned property at 420 Fourth Ave. as emergency overnight shelter immediately.

The Coalition works collaboratively to ensure safety and survival for people who are homeless, and to end the crisis of homelessness in our region.

77 So. Washington St., Seattle, WA 98104

(206) 204.8350

King County and Seattle share a desire to see more people indoors and fewer people desperate and abandoned on our streets. More people want and need safe, helpful, and consistent places to be in the day and at night than there is room in our community's shelters, day centers, and other services. It is imperative that local government (including all 39 cities in King County) do more.

In recent years, Seattle and King County have partnered, sharing resources to lengthen hours and dates of service, and to increase the numbers of men served in the Administration Building shelter. The 420 Fourth Ave. building offers a valuable opportunity for local governments to work collaboratively to ensure greater safety, survival, dignity, and hope for people who are homeless now. When thousands of people are trying to find basic shelter as best they can in empty buildings, under bridges, in parks, and in doorways, it is hard to imagine why an empty public building should not be leveraged to help them.

On behalf of our Coalition, I respectfully and urgently request that the King County Council and King County Executive work together to explore how best to:

1. Secure an expedited review of an application for temporary emergency shelter operations in the 420 Fourth Ave. building;
2. Identify what tenant improvements might be necessary to make it possible to operate shelter in the first floor of the building; and secure cost estimates for this work;
3. Identify funding and potential partners needed to open shelter as quickly as possible.

We hope that this additional shelter would be operational within one month, and would serve adults nightly through 2016, with hours matching those of the Seattle's City Hall shelter (7.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m.).¹

Leaving people to struggle for survival outside is expensive, both in terms of human lives, and in terms of high cost services for people in crisis. Repeated deployment of public workers to ask or force people who are homeless and have nowhere to go to move from public spaces (such as the public park directly across the street from 420 Fourth Avenue) is also costly, and ultimately ineffective without addressing people's basic needs. Seattle and King County taxpayers bear the burden of these policy choices, which together exceed any necessary improvements to the building, and the cost of operating services.

Finally, any use of the 420 Fourth Ave. building – whether for shelter, offices, or a combination of the two – will require some County investment in the structure. The costs associated specifically with opening shelter are likely to be limited, compared to the costs of allowing any occupied use of the building. I hope that as the

County considers how to make use of this property, it sees this as an opportunity to maximize the investment made when approving purchase of the building.

We stand ready to work with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alison Eisinger". The signature is written in black ink and includes a horizontal flourish at the end.

Alison Eisinger

Executive Director

cc: King County Executive Dow Constantine
Adrienne Quinn, Director, Department of Community and Human Services
Mark Ellerbrook, Regional Housing and Community Development Manager, DCHS
Mark Putnam, Director, All Home

ⁱNote: Funding year-round shelter in the 420 Fourth Ave. building would be a more reasonable and efficient way to respond to the need than beginning with winter-only shelter, and extending it via a patchwork of uncertain supplemental allocations. Last year, the Winter Shelter in the King County Administration Building opened October 1, 2014 and remained open through April 15, 2015, serving first 50 and then 100 men (thanks to an additional investment of \$117,000 from Seattle Human Services Department). Beginning February 1, 2015, improved operating hours (7.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m.) were restored. This year, the shelter is scheduled to open on November 1, but with reduced hours of operation (men must wait outside until 8.30 p.m.) for only 50 men. As Council staff wrote in their report to the Health, Housing, and Human Services Committee, “[D]uring each of the last several years, in response to increasing need, the council has approved supplemental funding to provide additional capacity at the winter shelter in terms of number of beds, number of hours each night, or numbers of months the county is open.”