



## King County

# KING COUNTY JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT LIMITS TO FUTURE PROGRESS

### Juvenile Court Facility Is in Disrepair.

Although King County Juvenile Court is nationally recognized as a model provider of juvenile justice programs, the Juvenile Court facility itself is in serious disrepair. The estimated cost of deferred maintenance alone exceeds \$20 million.

### Juvenile and Family Courts Lack Adequate Space.

The Juvenile Court facility is significantly undersized. The court is challenged to comply with occupancy limits while handling workflow and providing adequate security, and programs have insufficient space. Issues at this facility include:

- **No Opportunities for Service Linkage.** Juvenile and Family Court judges frequently must order services for the parties who come before them. This includes chemical dependency and mental health treatment, anger management or family functioning therapy, and supervised visitation. Existing facilities provide no space for onsite screening, assessment, and enrollment into services, significantly reducing compliance and delaying case resolution.
- **Poor Design for Ensuring Safety.** Cases involving children and families statistically pose the greatest threat for violence of all case types. Current facility design does not include separate spaces for high conflict cases or meet modern safety standards.
- **Crowding and Lack of Privacy.** Courtrooms and waiting areas are undersized and crowded. Courtrooms at Juvenile Court were designed for closed hearings, though open hearings are now required by law. Commissioner courtrooms at Juvenile Court are too small to allow calendar participants to observe others' hearings while preparing for their own. A lack of attorney-client interview rooms mean families must discuss sensitive matters in public hallways and in open waiting areas.
- **No Space for Childcare.** The current facility lacks the space to provide childcare for young children. Every day, children who come to court with their parents are exposed to high conflict and inappropriate courtroom scenes.
- **Critical Staff Housed Offsite.** Vital programs, such as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), are housed in rented space outside the court building. This creates barriers to timely service, resulting in delays when CASA's are called to court unexpectedly.

### Negative Impact of the Compartmentalized Nature of Juvenile and Family Courts.

In 1993, King County Superior Court joined with key justice stakeholders to address a growing recognition that families involved in the justice system would be better served if children and family justice services were integrated into one system. The compartmentalized nature of the legal system serving families limits the court's access to information regarding a family's involvement in other cases and increases the potential for conflicting, inconsistent, or duplicative orders; and contributes to a lack of coordination and information exchange among service providers working with the same family. These problems are exacerbated by the physical separation and distribution of matters involving children and families between the Juvenile Court at Alder, the King County Courthouse downtown, and the Maleng Regional Justice Center in Kent.

# THE VISION FOR A UNIFIED FAMILY AND JUVENILE COURT

The effort to overcome the physical limitations of the Juvenile and Family Court facilities provides the court with an opportunity to significantly improve access to justice for children and families. A "full-service" Children and Family Justice Center is needed.

## Benefits for clients:

- Synchronized results in cases involving children and families
- Better case and client information sharing
- Enhanced judicial decision-making based on deeper understanding of family context
- Improved access/linkage to services that support children and families in crisis

## Facility design benefits:

- A safe and secure environment
- A building that meets public health standards
- Adequate waiting areas and private attorney/client meeting spaces
- Room for childcare facilities
- Court services and staff available onsite
- Intake/enrollment for offsite/community services
- Appropriately-sized courtrooms

## Realizing the Vision: Next Steps

### Developing a Children and Family Justice Center – North King County

The provision of regionally accessible, coordinated, and efficient judicial services for children and families is the court's primary goal. First, the Juvenile Court facility must be replaced with a new facility that provides adequate space for the onsite provision of court services and linkage to critical offsite services to assist children and families in need.

On December 14, 2009, the King County Council affirmed the goal of unifying all juvenile offender, north county dependency and Becca cases, and north county family law matters involving children in a single facility. However, the Council requested that the Court and the Executive examine whether construction of the facility can be phased to make the project more affordable for the County in this challenging economic environment.

Superior Court and Executive branch staff determined that construction of the Children and Family Justice Center can be achieved in two distinct phases. The first construction phase will accommodate countywide juvenile offender cases and north county Becca and dependency matters through 2022. The courthouse will include space for 9 - 10 courtrooms, providing sufficient room for Superior Court to unify all north county juvenile cases in the new facility. Assuming project funding, construction is scheduled to begin in 2012 and conclude in 2016.

The second construction phase will add 5-7 courtrooms, allowing for the unification of all north county juvenile and family law matters. The timing of this second phase of construction has not been determined.