



# KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

DECEMBER 1, 2020





## Follow-up on the Domestic Violence in the Workplace Policy

**King County has made progress on recommendations to improve county responses to employee domestic violence concerns, but the updated policy and web resources are missing important elements, and trainings are still being implemented.** The Department of Human Resources (DHR) updated the Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy in September 2020 and communicated this change through the employee newsletter and supervisor-specific communications. DHR also launched a supervisor training initiative in 2019 that includes a segment on addressing domestic violence in the workplace. DHR indicated it is creating an online training as well. Training plans were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, however, and only a small percentage of supervisors have taken the training. The new policy also does not include best practices elements such as statements on confidentiality and anti-retaliation.

DHR's new approach to addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy relies less on supervisors and more on the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) than previously. EAP is well equipped to address several of the concerns identified in our audit, including the need to maintain specific contacts for employee safety precautions and to consider job-specific challenges and equity considerations when developing employee safety plans. By centralizing resources on the EAP webpage, DHR has helped ensure that employees have easy access to the information they need; however, the EAP webpage does not contain the new policy nor some best practice elements for webpages related to domestic violence.

**By implementing the remaining recommendations, King County can help ensure that employees receive the help they need when they face domestic violence.** By fully implementing training based on an updated policy, DHR can ensure that supervisors can help direct employees to resources as needed, without causing additional harm. By centralizing resources and implementing best practice elements on relevant webpages, King County can help ensure that employees experiencing domestic violence can safely find the resources that will help ensure their safety.

Of the nine audit recommendations:

	3 DONE		5 PROGRESS		0 OPEN		1 CLOSED
<b>Fully implemented</b> Auditor will no longer monitor.		<b>Partially implemented</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.		<b>Remain unresolved</b> Auditor will continue to monitor.		<b>No longer applicable</b> Auditor no longer monitor.	

Please see below for details on the implementation status of these recommendations.

## Recommendation 1

PROGRESS



**The Department of Human Resources should ensure that county supervisors and managers have access to training that provides them with the information they need to fulfill their role in addressing domestic violence.**

STATUS UPDATE: DHR launched a new leadership training series in late 2019 that includes a segment dedicated to the topic of domestic violence, holding two training sessions so far. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, further leadership training sessions were cancelled. To accommodate increases in telework, DHR plans to create an e-learning version of this training in 2021, including the segment focused on domestic violence.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation DHR needs to implement a training that is accessible to supervisors and provides them with the information they need to fulfill their role in addressing domestic violence in the workplace. Completion and widespread implementation of an e-learning training that includes this content and is accessible to supervisors would fulfill this recommendation. By fully implementing this training, DHR can help ensure that supervisors understand their role in addressing domestic violence, contributing to employee safety in these circumstances.

## Recommendation 2

PROGRESS



**The Department of Human Resources should update and communicate to employees the County's Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy to reflect current county priorities and information on resources and ensure the policy is updated as required by executive policy.**

STATUS UPDATE: DHR updated the Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy in September 2020. They communicated the policy change through employee news and management-specific communications. This update addressed some concerns identified during the audit, such as out-of-date hyperlinks, and emphasized the role of the EAP in addressing domestic violence concerns. Despite improvements, the updated policy did not include key best practices for such policies such as an anti-retaliation clause or language related to confidentiality.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, DHR would incorporate language into the Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy indicating the importance of confidentiality for domestic violence issues disclosed by employees. The policy should also incorporate an anti-retaliation clause. By incorporating these elements into the Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy, DHR can help ensure that employees maintain confidentiality when addressing domestic violence concerns, potentially improving employee safety. In addition, it would reduce the likelihood that employees would be retaliated against when coming forward with domestic violence concerns.

### Recommendation 3

CLOSED



**The Department of Human Resources should update and communicate to employees its Domestic Violence in the Workplace handbook and regularly ensure that its contents are up-to-date.**

STATUS UPDATE: DHR eliminated the Domestic Violence in the Workplace handbook. DHR emphasizes that under the new policy, employees (including supervisors) are expected to rely on the updated policy, current resources on the EAP website, and subject matter experts within EAP when addressing domestic violence concerns. DHR emphasized that it wants to connect employees with the correct support, namely the EAP, rather than relying heavily on supervisors with less expertise using a handbook.

While relying more heavily on EAP staff to address domestic violence concerns in the workplace alleviates the need for general guidance, it is important that DHR ensures that supervisors understand and can execute their responsibilities. Even if supervisors have a limited role in assisting employees, they should understand enough to fulfill that role, maintain confidentiality, and avoid disciplining employees for poor performance due to experiences with domestic violence.

### Recommendation 4

PROGRESS



**The Department of Human Resources should work with key agencies to establish and maintain contacts for assisting employees with domestic violence concerns, and make that information available to employees.**

STATUS UPDATE: This recommendation is partly addressed through DHR's decision to increase the role of EAP in addressing domestic violence concerns. EAP staff that is responsible for assisting employees with domestic violence concerns have established processes for developing and implementing safety plans. DHR did not provide a list of key contacts for assisting employees with domestic violence concerns during this follow-up, however.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, DHR needs to create a contact list for supervisors to assist employees with domestic violence concerns which the County plays a role in addressing. This should, at minimum, include a contact within the Facilities Management Division for adding a secure entry lock at the staff member's place of work and a contact within King County Information Technology for removing the staff member from the online directory, if necessary. The list should be readily available to supervisors or other staff responsible for implementing employee safety measures in response to domestic violence concerns.

## Recommendation 5

DONE



**In order to ensure the varying needs of employees can be met, the Department of Human Resources should ensure guidance on domestic violence in the workplace includes information about job-specific challenges.**

STATUS UPDATE: This recommendation is addressed through DHR's decision to increase the role of the EAP in addressing domestic violence concerns. Consideration of job-specific challenges is part of EAPs standard process when addressing employee safety concerns. As part of this work, EAP consults with supervisors and the employee on an incident response plan to help ensure the employee's safety.

IMPACT: By including staff with greater expertise in addressing domestic violence concerns in its standard process, DHR is helping to ensure that employees receive safety assistance tailored to their job-specific circumstances when needed.

## Recommendation 6

DONE



**The Department of Human Resources should ensure updates to the policy, handbook, and other resources are responsive to intersections between domestic violence and equity issues.**

STATUS UPDATE: DHR reports that updated policies are reviewed by the policy review team, including the workforce equity managers, for equity considerations. This review by the policy review team identified specific concerns about draft domestic violence resources related to language about contacting law enforcement. DHR reports that, in response to concerns that some groups may not feel safe contacting law enforcement, the final guidance contains altered language that addresses these concerns. EAP emphasized that it also considers equity when addressing employee concerns.

IMPACT: By incorporating equity considerations into domestic violence resources and the services it provides, DHR is helping ensure that all employees receive the help they need when they experience domestic violence.

## Recommendation 7

PROGRESS



**The Department of Human Resources should make its online resources intended to help employees address domestic violence concerns easier to find.**

STATUS UPDATE: DHR updated the EAP website to include domestic violence resources and has shared these resources and this webpage with employees through the employee newsletter. DHR representatives state that they plan to communicate these resources to employees on a regular basis as well. The EAP website does not include the new Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy, however.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, DHR should ensure that webpages that serve as hubs for employee domestic violence resources (such as the EAP webpage) include links to the

Domestic Violence in the Workplace policy. By including the policy in a prominent location, DHR can help ensure that employees understand their roles in addressing domestic violence, helping them to address these concerns without creating additional harm.

## Recommendation 8

PROGRESS



### **King County Information Technology should develop and communicate guidance to county agencies for webpages on domestic violence.**

STATUS UPDATE: King County Information Technology (KCIT) representatives explained that KCIT provided guidance on domestic violence related webpages and has begun working on a “quick exit” button for these types of webpages. The KCIT web governance committee has committed to developing this quick exit button and important contextual information on its use for inclusion on domestic violence related webpages. KCIT plans to make code for this button available to departments which have webpages related to domestic violence.

WHAT REMAINS: To complete this recommendation, KCIT should develop tools such as the quick exit button, and other guidance relating to domestic violence, as appropriate for implementation on relevant department webpages. These tools should be communicated to webpage editors within relevant agencies who can implement them. By developing and communicating tools and guidance for county webpages relating to domestic violence, KCIT can help ensure that people who visit these webpages are able to access important information while maintaining their own safety.

## Recommendation 9

DONE



### **In order to ensure that all employees are aware of and understand available resources and their role in the response to domestic violence in the workplace, the Department of Human Resources should create and disseminate domestic violence awareness materials, including print and online informational materials as well as making training available**

STATUS UPDATE: DHR has communicated domestic violence awareness materials to employees through several employee news emails, including one focused on Domestic Violence Awareness Month. DHR stated that hard copy materials are available upon request but have been less needed during mandatory social distancing.

IMPACT: By implementing this recommendation, DHR has helped to ensure that employees are aware of the resources available to them for addressing domestic violence concerns. When employees have access to materials such as these, they are better equipped to help themselves and others when domestic violence incidents occur.

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Kayvon Zadeh conducted this review. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the King County Auditor’s Office at [KCAO@KingCounty.gov](mailto:KCAO@KingCounty.gov) or 206-477-1033.