



Road map to

# Zero Youth Detention





**Lead with racial equity**

Identify and eliminate policies that result in racial disproportionality

Invest in the workforce

**Prevent youth from entering the juvenile legal system**



Support community based response to youth and families in crisis so that legal system involvement is rare and the last resort

Provide access to high quality, community based services for communities, youth, and families

Support development of restorative policies and practices to keep youth engaged in school



**Divert youth from the formal legal process and detention to community based options**

Divert youth from law enforcement arrest and/or citation

Divert youth from referral, case filing, and adjudication

Divert youth from secure detention



Ensure arrested and detained youth receive trauma-informed, culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate care

Reengage youth from detention into community

Expand family support and engagement opportunities and connections

**Support youth and families to reduce recurrence of legal system outcomes and improve health outcomes**



**Align and optimize connections between systems to increase effectiveness**

Align systems through partnership, common goals, outcomes and indicators

Utilize data and technology to optimize connections between legal, community, and services systems

Support policy reform that improves the lives of youth, children, and families and reduces legal system involvement

## Executive Summary

In his 2017 State of the County speech, King County Executive Dow Constantine stated:

*Zero detention as a goal is an accountability measure. It compels us to ask in each case: How can we provide justice for the victim, and protect the community from further harm, while ensuring the best chance at redemption for this young person? Is there a disproportionate impact here, and is that about bias in the justice system, or about bias in the broader society...And, critically, it forces us to ask: What can we do for the next generation, to ensure a different outcome?*

As called for by King County Executive Dow Constantine, this report, hereafter referred to as “the Road Map,” is a strategic plan to not just further reduce the use of secure detention for youth in King County, but to launch this county on the journey to eliminate it.

### **The Road Map to Zero Youth Detention makes the case for why getting to zero is essential.**

It outlines practical solutions informed by communities. Solutions that are designed to improve community safety and help young people thrive. Solutions that keep youth from entering the juvenile legal system or diverting them from further juvenile legal system involvement. Solutions that support strong communities. Research documented in this Road Map finds:

- Youth and families of color are at higher risk of becoming involved in the juvenile legal system due in large part to the cumulative disadvantages they experience resulting from systemic racism and bias.
- Despite deep reductions in the use of secure detention for all youth in King County since 1999, racial disproportionality has worsened.
- Most youth have a better chance at a positive adulthood when they don't interact with the juvenile legal system.
- There is little relationship between youth incarceration and overall youth crime in the community.
- Most crime victims prefer investments in programs for at-risk youth, community supervision, and holding people accountable through means other than incarceration.
- Restorative justice has been shown to reduce recidivism and produce greater satisfaction for most victims of crime.
- The normal process of adolescent brain development is to make risky choices for a period of time before reaching adulthood.
- Expanding and supporting positive youth development services to youth and families in their communities holds the most promise to keep youth from encountering the legal system.

### **The journey to Zero Youth Detention means carefully expanding the range of community-based diversion options until it becomes the primary response for most youth who come into contact with the legal system.**

More immediate, accountable, culturally responsive, family-oriented, and developmentally appropriate responses will result in safer communities and more resilient youth. Youth who are better able to stay on the path to a happy, healthy, safe, and thriving adulthood.

### **The journey to Zero Youth Detention is only possible through close partnership and collaboration with systems such as school districts; child welfare; law enforcement agencies; physical and behavioral health; and housing systems.**

King County and its partners have been reducing the use of secure detention for 20 years. The next reductions in the use of detention will come as a result of intentional collaboration with communities, law enforcement, schools, and the behavioral health system, among other partners. Since most of these systems and entities are not part of King County government, the Road Map highlights the different roles King County can play to bring these systems and communities together to support and advance the strategies and actions outlined in this report.

Because of the structural limitations on the County's General Fund revenue imposed by the State, the County will actively seek partnerships with community, philanthropy, higher education, the state, local jurisdictions, and the private sector to support and expand the work of Zero Youth Detention.

**The objectives, strategies, and action items in this Road Map have come through many avenues.**

They're drawn from community developed, community led, or community informed recommendations provided to the County over the last few years. They are informed from community engagement sessions in impacted communities; from individual interviews with youth and families involved in the juvenile legal system; and from juvenile legal system employees. They are informed by experts in brain science, adolescent development, trauma-informed treatment, and resilience. The goals and principles of the King County 2016-2022 Equity and Justice Strategic Plan are foundational to the Road Map.

**The Road Map is structured into three levels:**

- Objectives: Five overarching goals of Zero Youth Detention
- Strategies: Means for achieving the objectives
- Action Items: Specific steps or tactics to move the needle on strategies and objectives

**The work called for in this document is undertaken in collaboration with legal system leaders to continue juvenile legal system reform and improvements already underway in King County.**<sup>1,2</sup>

This Road Map reflects the broad spectrum of roles, responsibilities, and perspectives of those who oversee, operate, and support King County's juvenile legal system.<sup>3</sup> The nature of the issues involved with the juvenile legal system necessarily generates divergence in opinion and view. Thus, while there is consensus on a great deal of the recommendations and findings in the report and support for the direction of the Road Map, not all juvenile legal system actors are in agreement on every aspect of this report.

An overview of the objectives, strategies, and action items is included on the following pages.

*Please note that only a sample of action items are included in the executive summary.*

**Objective 1: Lead with racial equity**

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By leading with racial justice in the work of Zero Youth Detention, all stakeholders involved with the juvenile legal system are being called to commit to addressing systemic institutional racism and bias and to align efforts through this deeply challenging work.

**Strategies:**

- A.** Identify and eliminate policies that result in racial disproportionality
- B.** Invest in the workforce<sup>4</sup>

The strategies and action items for this objective recognize that, to eliminate the policies and practices that result in racial disproportionality, King County's workforce must be supported to continue and expand their work in solidarity with creating systems that lead to happy, healthy, safe, and thriving youth and families.

**Action items include:**

- Implement a racial equity impact analysis on current and future policies and practices
- Set racial equity improvement goals, providing cross agency and system access to regular reports and data
- Emphasize and expand the recruitment, hiring, and retention of culturally reflective staff at all levels
- Expand culturally responsive trainings for all who interface with legal system involved youth



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<sup>1</sup> The term "legal system" includes youth not only the criminal legal system, but also children and families involved with the child welfare dependency system, children in need of services, at risk youth, and/or school truancy matters.

<sup>2</sup> Due to historic injustices and inequities experienced in the "justice system" by people of color, people living in poverty, immigrants and refugees, people living with disabilities, and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, the Zero Youth Detention project and this Road Map uses the term "legal system" instead of "justice system."

<sup>3</sup> King County Executive, King County Superior Court, King County Prosecutor, King County Sheriff, and the King County Department of Public Defense.

## Objective 2: Prevent youth from entering the juvenile legal system by focusing upstream and on systems to have the greatest impact

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This objective recognizes partnership between youth and families, schools and communities, and the County is needed to enhance positive youth development and help position the youth on a healthy life course.

### Strategies:

- A. Support development of restorative policies and practices to keep youth engaged in school
- B. Provide access to high quality, community based services for youth and families
- C. Support community based response to youth and families in crisis so that legal system involvement is rare and the last resort

Understanding adolescent brain development, protective factors, and the role of resilience is foundational to upstream prevention efforts for youth.

### Action items include:

- Convene school partners to improve school discipline practices
- Continue and grow sustained investments in robust community options to serve high needs youth and families
- Expand culturally responsive evidence based and/or promising behavioral health practices for youth outside of and prior to involvement with the juvenile legal system
- Modify existing crisis intervention training for law enforcement to include specific modules on adolescent brain development and skills for addressing youth in crisis

## Objective 3: Divert youth from further law enforcement, formal legal processes, and secure detention into community based options

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This objective calls on legal system partners and community to work together to create an effective continuum of community-based approaches, accessed at different points in the juvenile legal process, that provide for community safety and for the developmental needs of youth.

### Strategies:

- A. Divert youth from law enforcement arrest and/or citation
- B. Divert youth from referral, case filing, and adjudication
- C. Divert youth from secure detention

Diverting youth out of the juvenile legal system, or to the least restrictive environment based on their individual needs while ensuring community safety, is usually in the best interest of youth.

### Action items include:

- Convene law enforcement and communities to develop and test alternative responses to formal arrest
- Expand Community Empowered Disposition Alternative and Resolution (CEDAR) program, an “expedited” case processing track
- Partner with community providers to expand use of electronic home monitoring (EHM) for youth

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<sup>4</sup> Workforce in the Road Map references King County employees.

## Objective 4: Support youth and families to reduce recurrence of legal system involvement and increase healthy outcomes

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The objective recognizes that young people who remain in their own community generally have better outcomes after contact with the juvenile legal system. However, when community-based resources are not a viable option and a youth must be placed in secure detention as a last resort, family engagement and reentry supports are essential.



### Strategies:

- A. Expand family engagement opportunities and connections
- B. Reengage youth from detention into community
- C. Ensure detained youth receive trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and developmentally appropriate care and services

Support youth and their family in their communities so that they achieve their full potential; youth do not return to the legal system; negative impacts to their lives are minimized; and their inherent strengths and skills are promoted.

### Action items include:

- Continue to expand visitation access to youth in detention
- Link youth exiting detention and their families with community ambassadors, credible messengers, community navigators and mentors and other supports
- Explore and pilot probation models that incorporate the principles of adolescent development
- Provide professional development training on trauma-informed care, adolescent brain development, implicit bias, undoing systemic racism, and other best practices to all county staff serving youth

## Objective 5: Align and optimize connections between systems to increase effectiveness

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When systems work together, the people they serve benefit. This objective recognizes that youth and families are often served by multiple systems and more can be done between and among systems to better coordinate.



### Strategies:

- A. Align systems through common goals, outcomes, and indicators
- B. Utilize data and technology to optimize connections between legal, community, and services systems
- C. Support policy reform that improves the lives of youth, children, and families and reduces legal system involvement

### Action items include:

- Jointly develop legal system related outcomes for children and youth across King County government executive departments and separately elected entities
- Integrate child welfare and dependency outcomes into juvenile legal strategies and programming
- Renew/reform Uniting for Youth collective action table to actively collaborate on, monitor, and address outcomes; and add labor representatives to table
- Support, enhance, and expand data sharing between and among King County departments and agencies and community
- Support state legislation that provides state funding for youth to access behavioral health services before coming into contact with the juvenile legal system, including adding inpatient behavioral health treatment beds

**Measuring Impact.**

The Road Map includes initial baseline metrics for the first four objectives; metrics for measuring impact of Objective 5 are not included in this report. They will be developed and incorporated in the next phase of Zero Youth Detention work. As specific strategies, policies, and practices are implemented, definitions of success will be identified along with measures and targets for further analyzing the impact and progress of the Zero Youth Detention work. Reporting on the progress toward objectives and adjustments to this plan will be accomplished through the establishment of a Zero Youth Detention data dashboard and through required reports due to the King County Council each June through 2021 regarding the County's efforts to reduce the use of secure detention.

**Community and Employee Engagement.**

A wide array of perspectives were sought on the development of this Road Map from across the county, with a particular emphasis on those most impacted by the juvenile legal system. The insights of King County employees were also sought to inform this work. The format of engagement included community meetings and focus groups, employee focus groups, digital surveys, and case examples from those involved in the juvenile legal system:

- 182 community members participated in community meetings and focus groups, with 79 employees participating in employee focus groups
- 2,132 King County residents and 142 employees responded to the digital survey
- 19 parents or guardians and 12 youth participated in case examples

**Clear challenges come with undertaking Zero Youth Detention work.**

It is difficult and it is complex. The lack of behavioral health resources, strained community capacity, the County's structural deficit and lack of resources, the resistance of some organizations to embrace and manage change, and the polarization of public opinion are some of the broad challenges involved with Zero Youth Detention. Better data is needed. Underscoring these challenges is the reality that there is no recipe for success. This work is at the forefront of innovative public policy.

**Zero Youth Detention is a bold, complex, and difficult to achieve goal.**

It is also a goal that may be misunderstood as reducing accountability for youth, risking community safety, or ignoring the needs of youth and families in crisis. The objectives, strategies, and actions outlined in this Road Map reflect the opposite. This strategic plan is also a Road Map to Stronger Accountability and Community Safety, a Road Map to Better Youth & Family Outcomes, and a Road Map to Eliminate Racial Disproportionality in Secure Detention. All of these are the expected milestones of this journey.

**This Road Map is a work in progress.**

The Road Map's ultimate destination is Zero Youth Detention, but the journey itself is expected to yield changes in systems, policies, and services leading to better outcomes for youth and communities. To drive this work, King County is using the public health approach for Zero Youth Detention, bringing together community and system partners guided by the latest science on positive youth development to understand and implement what best promotes the well-being of youth and families and community safety. In addition to the work already underway and the investments the Executive is recommending in the 2019-2020 budget, the next phase of work will accelerate the actions in the Road Map. Next steps include identifying potential funding sources; convening and consulting with community, employee, and labor partners; developing metrics, and reporting on progress.

