

King County Regional AFIS FAQs

1. What is an AFIS?

An Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) is a searchable database of fingerprint and palm print records. In King County, the AFIS serves two primary purposes:

- To identify crime scene (latent) fingerprints and palm prints that aid in investigations and provide evidence in court.
- To quickly identify arrested individuals, preventing the wrongful release of those using false names, and establish accurate criminal history records.

2. What is the AFIS levy?

King County's regional AFIS program is funded by a property tax levy that was last approved by voters in 2012. The levy funds the fingerprint technology and resources to support identification and crime-solving efforts by all agencies within the county.

3. What technology and services are included?

The levy supports the AFIS computer, 53 Livescan fingerprinting devices connected to the AFIS computer, and 270 Mobile ID handheld fingerprint devices used by officers for remote searches in the field. This includes the hardware, software, interfaces, and maintenance of the network, as well as connections to state and federal systems. King County AFIS can search Washington State Patrol (WSP) and FBI AFIS databases, as well as other states.

Other services include responding to crime scenes to collect fingerprint evidence, processing evidence on-scene or in a laboratory, fingerprinting in the regional jails, identifying individuals arrested prior to release, and training officers on techniques and technology to increase identification "hits".

4. What is the benefit of having a centralized, regional AFIS program?

A regional approach provides technology and services at a reduced cost by sharing resources.

By state law, police agencies are obligated to handle their own criminal identification services or depend on the WSP. Funding biometric technology and forensic examiners would be large investments for local agencies to support on their own, especially when the volume of work does not justify the expense. State systems tend to be minimally funded and have different priorities and goals than local agencies.

Models similar to King County Regional AFIS include the Los Angeles County Regional Identification System (LACRIS) and the Northern Virginia Regional Identification System (NOVARIS), which have also found success in maintaining local databases and sharing services.

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5. What if the levy did not pass and there was no further funding?

Without sustained regional funding, the responsibility for criminal identification would revert to each local police department (for the cities) or Sheriff's Office (for unincorporated areas), per state law.

The elimination of AFIS funding would result in the reduction or elimination of technology and staff for arrest identifications and forensic investigations.

A city's options would be to fund its own staff and services, contract with another agency, or rely on WSP's identification services. WSP's absorption of the high volume of work performed in King County, the largest county in the state, would result in backlogs, causing delays in criminal identifications.

6. What is the cost of the levy? What does it include?

In 2019, the AFIS levy would cost the owner of a home with an assessed value of \$550,000 approximately \$19.25 per year (\$1.60 per month).

The rate would be \$0.035 (3.5 cents) per \$1,000 assessed valuation. The current rate in 2018 is \$0.042 (4.2 cents).

King County Assessor's Tax Transparency Tool: To figure out your cost select the link below and type in your address. Your current and future costs for the 2019-24 AFIS levy will be calculated for you.

<http://localscape.spatalest.com/#kingcountyassessor/Tax>

The estimated revenue is \$126.2 million to continue program funding for six years, through 2024.

This is not an additional cost; it replaces the 2013-2018 levy.

The proposed legislation would continue funding technology and services, including newly established response teams to increase the collection of prints at crime scenes, and the processing laboratory approved by voters in the 2012 levy. Efficiencies include improved technology and processes resulting in an estimated \$6.9 million cost reduction.

7. Isn't fingerprint technology being replaced by DNA, facial recognition, or iris?

Fingerprints, DNA, facial recognition, and iris scanning, are each important for identification purposes, but one does not replace the other.

Fingerprints can distinguish between people, even identical twins, quickly and easily and at a very low cost compared to DNA. DNA is effective for both biometric identification and crime scene investigation, however, the cost and time to analyze DNA is significantly higher than using fingerprints. There are also times when DNA is not present at a crime scene and fingerprints are the only evidence found.

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Facial recognition is limited to investigations where photos or videos are available, while iris scanning is primarily used for access control and does not have much application in crime scene evidence recovery (criminals don't leave behind their iris-prints!).

Fingerprints remain the foundation of criminal identification and the basis for all criminal records worldwide.

8. What are the key dates for the election?

6/22 – overseas & service ballots mailed

7/17 – local voters' pamphlet mailed

7/18 – ballots mailed

7/19 – drop boxes open

8/7 – ballots postmarked by 8 pm

8/21 – election results certification

For further questions, please contact Carol Gillespie at (206) 263-2721 or carol.gillespie@kingcounty.gov