

September 24, 2011

Island County Council of Governments

Re: Five Year Emergency Statutory Relief on Juvenile Detention Mandate

My fellow elected executive officials,

For a litany of reasons, Island County Government has been caught “with it’s pants down” at a most inopportune time. We were slow to approach modern technologies for their efficiencies. That coupled with a devastating blow to our “bread winning” Construction industry, has left us severely injured.

Taxpayers are waiting 1 ½ years for a property tax refund, our Auditor can hardly keep up with the responsibilities for the state and our Sheriff’s vehicle supply is becoming badly tattered.

The past 2 years of cuts, bandages and a long awaited “windfall” have brought us to precarious stability, but certainly not recovery. The recent flexibility of REET funds from the legislature is really only providing a new reserve to deplete.

I see an option that would allow us to shore up our REET reserves and temporarily vacate unaffordable services at the same time. I’m talking about a temporary closure of our juvenile detention facility.

State law mandates we have a juvenile detention center and that is now costing us \$575.00 per juvenile, per day. Six times what it cost to house an adult inmate.

Please consider joining my effort to seek temporary relief from this unfunded mandate.

History

RCW 13.04.135, codified in 1983, requires Counties over 50,000 in population to have a local juvenile detention facility. The 1990 census reported Island County’s population as 60,195. In November of 1998, it was decided by a vote of the people of Island County, to impose a 1/10 of 1% sales tax solely for providing funds for costs associated with financing, designing, acquisition, construction, equipping, operating, maintaining, remodeling, repairing, re-equipping, and improvement of an Island County Juvenile Detention Facility.

The Facility, which opened in 2006, was anticipated to cost \$4.5M. There was a cost overrun of \$1.7M (nearly 138%). The bond was refunded in 2005, payments continue to be paid from the REET fund and the remaining liability is currently 1,245,000.

Present

Along with the State mandate come minimum staffing requirements. We currently have ten fulltime, one halftime and nine on call employees. With an average detainee population of 5.2, we regularly have more staff on site, than juveniles to house.

Operating costs of \$700,000 in 2006, have grown to \$1.1 M last year and are forcing a Current Expense transfer of over \$400,000 annually.

Costs continue to increase despite changes in State law pertaining to juvenile justice which has, at the same time, resulted in a significantly decreased need for detention. The Becca law, juvenile drug court and diversion programs have all greatly reduced the need for housing.

When you also consider our demographics, which show we have a greater percentage of retirees than many other counties, a substantial number of single sailors, and a juvenile population that, according to the 2010 census, has decreased 10% since 2000, I see a very compelling argument for seeking temporary statutory relief.

Island County Specifics & Options

Island County should consider establishing interlocal agreements with Skagit and Snohomish counties to house all Island County juvenile detainees temporarily, while we work to regain our footing.

The cost to house juveniles in neighboring Skagit County is \$124.00 daily. Based on an average of 5.2 detainees in Island County's facility, the cost to house all Island County juveniles in Skagit County would be about \$235,000 a year. Estimated cost to transport Island County juveniles to and from the Skagit County facility as needed would be about \$65,000 annually, bringing the total to \$300,000.

Housing all juveniles in the Skagit County facility while reducing Island County facility staff could result in an estimated savings of \$700,000 per year as shown below. Further, the Island County facility would be available for adult inmates to be housed while renovations are being performed on the existing jail.

Juvenile Court Administrator.....	\$27,000
Maintain Building.....	25,000
Added cost to Clerk's office (for administration).....	50,000
Transport and Housing out of County.....	<u>300,000</u>
Expenses.....	400,000
Current Operating Cost.....	<u>1,100,000</u>
Savings.....	<u>\$700,000</u>

Conclusions

The savings could be applied to the payments of the bond. This would free up those REET funds currently being used for that purpose. That in turn would shore up those funds (REET), which are currently being depleted because of the new flexibility on those accounts.