



The Municipal League Foundation
220 Second Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98104

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Municipal League Foundation
SUPPORTS
King County Proposition 1—Best Starts for Kids
General Election Ballot Measure

Overview

This measure authorizes a six-year property tax levy to improve the health and well-being of children, youth, families and communities. The proposed rate of taxation is \$0.14 per \$1,000.00 of assessed property within King County, with authorization of annual rate increases of up to 3% to account for inflation. The average King County homeowner will pay roughly \$60 per year. The levy will raise \$65 million annually.

The levy proceeds will be used to fund prevention and early intervention strategies, apportioned as follows:

- 50% to early childhood development, from birth through age 5;
- 35% to early intervention services to address developmental problems up through the age of 24;
- 10% on “Communities of Opportunity”, a collaborative effort with the Seattle Foundation leveraging additional funds to reinforce a child’s progress in the communities in which he/she lives;
- 5% for evaluation, data collection and program improvement.

Funds from the levy will largely go to community-based programs providing the following:

- Services for pregnant women and newborns;
- Access to safe and healthy food;



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- Improved access to mental health services and developmental screening;
- Prevention and early intervention in chronic disease, mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence and incarceration.

In addition, funding will be used to reduce inequities in outcomes for children and youth; and to strengthen, integrate and encourage innovation in health and human services agencies. Specifically with respect to the first year proceeds, \$19 million will fund a youth and family homelessness prevention initiative and cover levy election costs.

Lastly, an oversight and advisory board comprising county residents and stakeholders with geographically and culturally diverse perspectives will be established to make recommendations and monitor distribution of levy proceeds.

Arguments FOR the Measure

The Municipal League believes that the following are some of the strongest arguments in favor of King County Proposition 1:

- Providing services to insure children get off to a healthy start, and continuing early intervention on the wide panoply of development issues, including parent education, caregiver training, developmental screenings, and targeted help for young families facing economic hardship or homelessness can keep children on a healthy path. This rationale is supported by brain development research at the University of Washington (e.g. the Heckman Study).
- Behavioral intervention services, including helping teachers and parents identify behavioral and mental health problems, and the full array of counseling and intervention services provided by human service providers selected for funding, will help keep children and youth from falling into more destructive patterns that will prove more costly to society, such as dropping out of school or becoming part of the criminal justice system. The County's current Mental Illness and Drug Dependency Plan serves as a proven model for such interventions.
- Funding will go primarily to well-established human service organizations that can show an ability to deliver services effectively. Only a little over 10% of the funding will go to public agencies, and that will primarily be for services within the King County Public Health agency.



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- An evaluation instrument (5% of the funds) will be built into this program to ensure services are proving effective and/or can be fine-tuned to be more effective.
- A broad-based coalition of supporters endorse this levy, including an 8 to 1 majority of the King County Council, the King County Executive, United Way of King County, many human service providers, and business groups (e.g. Seattle Metro Chamber of Commerce).

Arguments AGAINST the Measure

The Municipal League believes that the following are some of the strongest arguments counseling against passage of King County Proposition 1:

- The continual reliance on government by initiative is an impractical way to operate. For most citizens, it is difficult to fully and fairly evaluate the merits of the measure, given the complexity of the issues and the fact that piecemeal legislation-by-initiative makes it difficult to assess the overall budget impact of individual measures.
- This is yet another measure depending on property taxes for funding. Citizens are increasingly frustrated with paying more and more in property tax.
- The county has not fully reinstated basic services that were cut during the 2008-09 downturn. Some of those include critical services, such as law enforcement, roads and bridges.

Recommendation and Rationale

The Municipal League recommends voting YES on King County Proposition 1.

The Municipal League believes that an investment in King County's children and their families as outlined in this proposal is a worthy and cost-effective measure. Because the competitive bids for services will largely go to already-established, community organizations, there is ample reason to trust that funds will be well-spent on proven programs and experienced human service providers. The Municipal League is further persuaded that providing services early on to children at risk will help forestall greater problems down the road, including outcomes that are much more costly to society such as involvement in the criminal justice system (currently 75% of the county budget). The measure also calls for leveraging community support, such as the Communities of Opportunity program that will be carried out in collaboration with the Seattle Foundation.



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The Municipal League is pleased that there is a reasonable set-aside for evaluation and coordination through data systems. Further encouraged by the broad support for this measure from the County Council (an 8-1 vote in favor) and many well-respected community organizations, the Municipal League confidently supports King County Proposition 1.

