



2023 Public Safety Investments

A Special Report



Councilmember Andrew J. Lewis



Letter from Councilmember Andrew J. Lewis

As Seattle transitions out of the COVID-era and into a new post-COVID state of existence public safety is the most immediate issue demanding our attention. In 2022, the City Council, working closely with Mayor Harrell, approved a myriad of public safety programs and initiatives through legislation, the Metropolitan Park District, and the 2023-2024 biennial budget. However, until now, no comprehensive list of these measures has been compiled and made available to the public.

In the spirit of my office's report from fall of 2021 regarding homelessness policy in the COVID-era, I have put together this summary of new public safety assets and initiatives funded in the current budget and anticipated to be implemented in 2023. These services cover a range of purposes from the recruitment and retention of police officers, to expanded interventions based in public health and outreach, and alternative direct services to activate parks and open spaces.

Some of these initiatives build on existing services and some are entirely new. They are designed to hold community members accountable, but also to breakdown barriers to care, meet vulnerable neighbors where they are, and, where possible, resolve low-level offenses outside of the criminal legal system. Some of these initiatives will be visible very soon while others may not kick in until later in the year, but

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in all cases they reflect a new spirit of collaboration between Mayor Harrell and the Seattle City Council to make comprehensive progress on true community safety.

I greatly appreciate your consideration in taking a look at this list of efforts to meet the moment on public safety. My office is happy to answer any additional questions about the initiatives listed in this report.

Regards,,



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Seattle Police Recruitment and Retention

As of December 2022, the Seattle Police Department (SPD) was on track to have 961 deployable officers, the lowest number in over 30 years. In response to this personnel decline Mayor Harrell proposed a [recruitment and retention plan](#) last July to increase police staffing. This plan calls for increasing incentives, speeding up hiring bottlenecks, and increased officer wellness.

In August of 2022, the Council approved an [ordinance](#) sponsored by Councilmember Lisa Herbold to enact some of the more immediate parts of Mayor Harrell's plan, including moving bonuses for lateral hires out of state and an additional recruiter. The 2023-2024 biennial budget added additional components of the plan, including \$30,000 signing bonuses for lateral hires and \$7,500 for new recruits, waiver of a testing fee, and new support staff to do thorough background checks and additional recruitment and promotion. The Council provided funding for the retention package proposed by Mayor Harrell in the final 2023-24 budgets .

SPD expects these recruitment and retention incentives to result in a net gain of 30 officers in 2023. The Council receives quarterly updates from SPD on recruitment and retention and will be assessing these measures for their effectiveness.

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Mayor Harrell proposed a recruitment and retention plan last July to increase police staffing. This plan calls for increasing incentives, speeding up hiring bottlenecks, and increased officer wellness. [...] The full recruitment and retention package proposed by Mayor Harrell for the 2023-2024 biennium was included in the final [Council] budget.



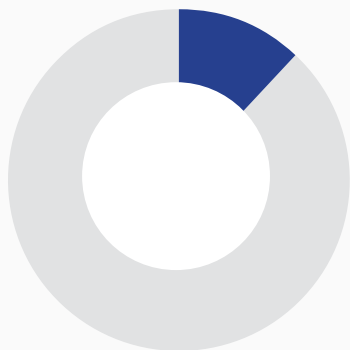
Dual Dispatch 911 Response

For the past two years the Seattle City Council has pushed for alternative civilian responses to calls for service where a police response is not necessary. With the election of Mayor Harrell the Council has a partner willing to work in good faith on this common-sense and broadly accepted best practice. In this past budget the Seattle City Council, with the full support of Mayor Harrell, funded a pilot program to jointly respond to a subset of low-level calls, thereby freeing up sworn officer time for calls for service requiring a police response.

A [report](#) from the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) analyzing SPD data found that 79.7% of SPD calls for service are non-criminal in nature, 14.2% misdemeanors, and 6.1% felonies. While the report

concluded that 49% of SPD calls for service could be handled by an alternative response, a significant percentage of those calls require more scrutiny to truly be handled by a non-police responder. However, there is [consensus](#) between the City Council and SPD that, at the very least, 12% of calls for service representing 6% of officer response caseload can be diverted to an alternative response service in the short-term. This category is anticipated to be the focus of the pilot.

In Denver, a [similar program](#) called Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) correlated to a 34% decrease in petty crimes, like trespassing and public disorder, in the service area. The STAR team, composed of a mental health clinician and paramedic in a shared van, is directly dispatched by 911 based on two screening criteria. First, the call falls into a limited list of low-risk incidents, like intoxication, trespass, or a welfare check. Second, there is



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Two thirds of those responses [by the Denver STAR Program] required no assistance from police, allowing them to focus on calls for service requiring a police response. This tracks with a similar program in Albuquerque New Mexico that responded to 16,000 calls for service in 2022, over half of which would otherwise have required a police response.

no indicated evidence of significant danger, like weapons or reported violence.

The single van STAR pilot responded to 748 incidents over a six month period. Two thirds of those responses required no assistance from police, allowing them to focus on calls for service requiring a police response. This tracks with a [similar program](#) in Albuquerque New Mexico that responded to 16,000 calls for service in 2022, over half of which would otherwise have required a police response.

The next steps in developing and deploying this pilot are governed by a document called a [“term sheet”](#). An agreement between the City Council and Mayor Harrell to develop and deploy this new service in 2023. While there is no concrete date for Seattle’s version of this increasingly adopted public safety strategy to be deployed, the term sheet and secure funding brings us closer than ever before to realizing this essential service.

Park Rangers

There are few public amenities Seattleites are more proud of than our park system. Seattle Parks and Recreation manages 489 public parks totaling 6,441 acres, 12% of Seattle’s total land area. Making sure our parks are safe and welcoming places for leisure and recreation is a top priority for Seattle government. That is why the Seattle City Council, sitting in their capacity as the Seattle Metropolitan Park District Board of Directors, approved a significant increase in the park ranger program starting in 2023.

Seattle park rangers are a uniformed service with the mission to enhance safety and quality of life for Seattle park patrons. Rangers assist park activation and concierge staff, promote compliance with park rules, and coordinate with service providers, law enforcement, and business



improvement areas to keep parks safe. Moreover, as of 2022, park rangers carry the overdose reversing drug naloxone.

While park rangers can issue trespass warnings they are not sworn law enforcement officers, do not have the power to make arrests, and are unarmed. Their role is to provide a diplomatic and authoritative presence and serve as a resource for park patrons to be good stewards of our public spaces.

Currently, Seattle has a total of two park rangers. Yes, you read that correctly, two. With the passage of the 2023-2028 Metropolitan Park District funding plan, Seattle parks will see a total of 28 park rangers activating our downtown open spaces in 2023. This dramatic increase in ranger staffing will make a big difference in our parks and open spaces. If you see a ranger please say hi and thank them for their service!

Let Everyone Advance with Dignity

A cornerstone of Seattle's public safety response is [Let Everyone Advance with Dignity](#) (LEAD), formerly known as Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion. LEAD is a social

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service diversion program providing intensive outreach and case management to people involved in the criminal legal system to resolve underlying causes of criminal activity and prevent re-offending. As the original name implies, LEAD started primarily as an alternative to the criminal legal system for contacts made by Seattle police. Over decades, the program has evolved to allow referrals from multiple sources, including law enforcement, to best serve the community and provide an alternative pathway to resolve public health challenges that are resulting in public disorder.

During COVID, a separated, but related, program called COLEAD was created to respond to the situation in Downtown Seattle where encampments, high volumes of low-level crime, and violent crime were posing significant challenges to public health and safety. Thanks to [legislation](#) sponsored by my office, COLEAD was able to [resolve 14 of the most serious encampments](#) in the Downtown core serving more than 500 people. These sites included the encampments on [3rd Avenue](#), [the Pioneer Square Pergola](#), and [City Hall Park](#). A UW study found that after a COLEAD action 911 call volume decreased by 39% in the area served, finding a significant correlation in the decrease of criminal activity.

The COLEAD system of resolving encampment locations through casework, services, and housing and shelter connections has formed the core philosophy of the new

King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA). Historic strategies based primarily on displacement move encampments from one location to another instead of removing them by resolving the needs of the people in the encampment. This biennial budget passed by the City Council builds on the success of COLEAD to continue this critical work.

You can learn more about LEAD and COLEAD at this [link](#).

Services for Survivors of Sexual Exploitation

Trauma-informed care for people who have experienced sexual exploitation, domestic violence, and sexual

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assault is a critical foundation for comprehensive public safety. Under the leadership of Council President Debora Juarez, the City Council included a \$200,000 investment in the 2023 budget to expand services for the Safe, Healthy, Empowered (SHE) Clinic. SHE Clinic is a partnership between [Aurora Commons](#) and Harborview Medical Center created in 2018 to provide healthcare services, including treatment for addiction, to survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, domestic violence, and sexual assault.

Aurora Commons serves over 400 people a year, providing care, wellness, and connections to community members, with the SHE Clinic serving as a big part of that impact. By addressing root causes, forging relationships, and breaking down barriers to access services, SHE Clinic makes our community safer for everyone and provides much needed care for some of Seattle's most vulnerable community members.

Community Safety and Communications Center

The City of Seattle's independent Community Safety and Communications Center handles approximately 900,000 calls per year and by definition has to be staffed 24 hours per-day 365 days a year. The 911 dispatchers who make it all happen are essential first responders charged with the critical responsibility of dispatching assistance to us in our worst moments. They are exposed to significant secondary trauma, have to juggle and multitask thousands of calls for service from dozens of different agencies,

and do all this work with no margin for error. On average, dispatchers pick up an incoming call within 11 seconds, and we know a few seconds can be precious time in a life threatening emergency.

While there has rightly been significant public coverage of employee shortages in other public safety departments the unacceptable shortage of 911 dispatchers has not attracted as much attention. A [KUOW story](#) from August of 2022 reported Washington State Patrol dispatching were less than 50% staffed. In the recent past, as reported in this [KOMO story](#), Seattle similarly had over half of our 911 dispatcher positions vacant.

To enhance our ability to efficiently and effectively respond to emergency calls, and give much needed assistance and support to our first responder 911 dispatchers, the Council added two additional 911 dispatcher positions for 2023. These critical new dispatchers will help our efforts to reduce response times and get appropriate assistance to help community members during their time of need. You can learn more about the Community Safety and Communications Center at this [link](#).

Regional Peacekeepers

Gun violence is a crisis of public safety and health in every community in the United States, including Seattle. Interventions that bring us together as a community can make a difference to disrupt the cycle of violence, advance healing, and get guns off our streets. One such effort

in King County is the Regional Peacekeepers Collective (RPKC), a multi-organization network of providers and community groups focused on intervention, prevention, and restoration services to end gun violence.

RPKC is a local example of an emerging national trend called community-based violence interruption (CVI). CVI models recognize that some categories of gun violence can be predicted, intercepted, and prevented by reaching out to people impacted by gun violence to reduce conflict and expand community wellness. For example, CVI counselors reach out to victims of gun violence during hospitalization to prevent retaliation and connect survivors to services. They also work directly with people in the community to identify community members at risk of becoming either perpetrators or victims of gun violence to prevent tragedies from occurring.

Harborview Medical Center treats approximately 100-150

young people between the ages of 16-24 for gun related injuries every year. Similarly, the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office identifies 50-80 young people per-year who pose the largest risk to commit an act of gun violence and there is significant overlap between the two categories. While a heavy focus on our youngest community members is critical there is great value in expanding the age range of the cohort.

The additional \$300,000 investment made by the Council in our recent budget bolsters a hospital-based response program to provide intensive engagement for young men aged 25-40. This critical program provides counseling, wrap-around services, and engagement to help victims heal and recover, while also working to prevent retaliatory shootings. This investment closes a critical gap in coverage and will help RPKC expand its impact.

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Bronx, New York, found a CVI program correlated to a 63% decrease in gunshot victims, with a similar [study](#) finding a 43% reduction in Richmond, California. You can learn more about CVI generally at this [link](#), and you can learn more about RPKC at this [link](#).

Nurse Practitioner for Health One

In 2021, the Seattle Fire Department (SFD) responded to [93,233 emergencies](#), 60% of which were for basic life support. Emergency medical services are a core function of SFD and the department continues to be an innovator to effectively deliver this service. In 2019, SFD in collaboration with the City Council and Mayor created the [Health One](#) program to proactively resolve low-level calls before they become emergencies. This small nimble unit frees up critical time for SFD to respond to life threatening emergencies when we need it most. The team is composed of a firefighter, a social services caseworker, and, after this recently passed budget, a nurse practitioner.

A majority of the people Health One responds to are experiencing homelessness and many have health challenges related to undiagnosed behavioral mental health and substance addiction. Adding a nurse practitioner to the personnel of Health One will allow the team to complete service needs assessments for clients, write prescriptions for medications if necessary, develop care plans for disease management with clients, and help arrange ongoing primary-care referrals. In the 2023-2024 budget, the Council appropriated \$200,000 to support nurse practitioner consultant services to fulfill this role in Health One.

You can learn more about the Health One program at this [link](#) and review the most recent annual report from SFD at this [link](#).



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