

Joint statement:

Restoring staffing levels at the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention is one of our highest priorities, and DAJD and its Director have been demonstrating their commitment to this priority with substantial ongoing action over the last several years. The staffing challenges that the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention is confronting at King County jails are common in the field of corrections, law enforcement, and other frontline essential positions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also are seeing an ongoing wave of people who are leaving the department because, after many years of dedicated service, they are eligible for retirement. This owes, in part, to the large group of officers that this department hired over a short period to staff up the Maleng Regional Justice Center when it first opened in 1997. Many officers from this cohort are now eligible, or will soon be eligible, to retire based on years of service and/or age.

There is fierce competition for qualified applicants, and this is especially true for public safety agencies. This is why King County offers hiring incentives of \$12,000 for new correction officers and juvenile detention officers, regardless of experience, and \$25,000 for lateral (experienced) hires. Newly hired lateral officers who are moving to Washington may also be eligible for \$5,000 in moving expenses. King County employees who refer a successful applicant for hire are also eligible for a \$5,000 referral bonus.

Our recruitment team has been working on a robust advertising campaign with radio spots, digital advertisements, and billboards encouraging people to apply for CO jobs. They are frequently scheduled at job fairs, including several at military installations and colleges throughout our region. We have temporarily expanded our recruitment team and recently added a recruitment sergeant who has been helping to spearhead this outreach. Many potential recruits have toured the jails in recent months.

Just last week, we hosted a hiring event at the Maleng Regional Justice Center that was focused on hiring new officers. Director Nance spoke at length to a group of more than 20 potential recruits and encouraged them to apply to work with our department, not just as a job, but as a meaningful career serving our community in the interest of public safety. We expect to receive several high-quality applicants from this event, and plan to host additional events of this kind this year.

These ongoing efforts have helped the department hire the highest number of new COs in 2023 than it has in any single year in the last 20 years and has positioned us to be on track to hire even more in 2024.

We are committed to restoring full staffing to our facilities to reduce the amount of overtime that officers are working, so that they can enjoy a better work-life balance. Meanwhile, the Department has worked with the Guild on ways to minimize the impacts of overtime on its staff, by providing temporary higher overtime wage rates and other benefits. Management has also been in dialogue with the Guild to explore alternative shifts and staffing models to increase recruitment and retention.

Going forward, we will continue to explore additional ways to support our employees and restore sustainable staffing levels to ensure that we are providing the safest environment possible for everyone who works, visits or is housed at our detention facilities. We count on our Corrections Guild as our key partner in both recruitment and retention of outstanding colleagues.