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Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers Announces Actions to Fight Racism

SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash., June 12, 2020 – Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers today signed a proclamation announcing his proposed actions to fight racism. These proposed actions follow the murder of George Floyd, widespread protests for justice, and are in response to continuing institutional and systemic racism in Snohomish County.

“It is my obligation to address the devaluation of Black lives in the nation and in our community,” said Executive Somers. “The frightening killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Manuel Ellis, John T. Williams, and so many others are only the most recent in a history of injustices and horrors committed against the Black community. Slavery predated our nation and funded our Founding. Jim Crow and the failure of Reconstruction offered only the illusion of freedom to Black Americans. Today, we see racialized policing leading to the over-representation of persons of color in our criminal justice system and jails. This is unacceptable, and we must change.”

“I believe it is important that we engage the community on meaningful criminal justice reform,” said Snohomish County Council Chair Nate Nehring. “I look forward to hearing and considering proposals which will come forward to implement positive change.”

“Change will be made of all the steps we take to address the racism and injustice found in our institutions, communities, and ourselves,” said Council Vice Chair Stephanie Wright. “Real progress comes from listening to the people and learning from their stories. Together, we must scrutinize every corner of every system and take concrete steps to improve them.”

“I am committed to listening and engaging with everyone in Snohomish County,” said Councilmember Sam Low. “Clearly, it is now time for action, and I look forward to working with my Council colleagues to implement effective and fair changes.”

“Now is the time to listen to each other and come together to find meaningful solutions,” said Councilmember Megan Dunn. “We can commit to focusing our efforts on responding to the pandemic and addressing the systemic inequities that have been exacerbated by this crisis and called to light by recent protests. Our community is demanding action, and we must meet their just demands with lasting change.”

“We have an historic opportunity to take the positive energy on our streets and translate it into significant change for all Americans,” said Councilmember Jared Mead. “It’s well past time we listen to our communities and create policy that will ensure our systems work for everyone.”

Executive Somer's proposals include:

- Immediately reassign Executive staff to create an Office of Social Justice to develop a culture focused on social justice, including:
 - Working with the County Council and the Executive Department's Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity Task Force to set strategic, measurable, and actionable goals, including codifying the role of the Office of Social Justice.
 - Creating a funded and staffed Community Police Oversight Board.
 - Collaborating with the Prosecuting Attorney and Office of Public Defense to reform our cash bail system.
 - Collaborating with the Prosecuting Attorney and Office of Public Defense to address outstanding legal financial obligations that impact indigent persons in 2021.
 - Collaborating with the Snohomish County Council, Prosecuting Attorney, and Sheriff to invest and install dashboard and body cameras and require their use by all county law enforcement officers.
- In the 2021 budget to Council, prioritize continuing outreach and engagement efforts to marginalized communities. We must be more inclusive of their concerns while implementing policies and recommendations proven to be successful, such as the ones from [Campaign Zero](#) and [#H8CANTWAIT](#).
- Collaborate with appropriate partners to assess needs for the reallocation of funds to invest in communities of color and social services which promote equity and health.
- Invest in our amazing employees by:
 - Collaborating with experts to provide antiracism, inherent bias, and trauma-informed training for all new and current Snohomish County employees, including law enforcement, to occur this fall.
 - Requiring all Executive department leadership to begin work: to undo institutional racism; to identify and understand systemic racism and its impact on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color); to increase understanding of White privilege and the impacts of long standing policy and laws impacting persons of color.
 - Collaborating with the Sheriff and Human Resources to provide trauma-informed counseling and leave for law enforcement officers involved in traumatic incidents.
- Working with the Snohomish County Council to amend the Snohomish County Charter.
- Working with the Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney to address structural racism and recommend changes in county government.

Executive Somers continued: "We must accept the role we and our institutions have historically and institutionally played in devaluing Black lives. The devaluation and degradation of Black lives is not unique to this place or time. All levels of government have been responsible for the oppression and death of persons of color. Black People have been and are still disenfranchised at the polls and been the victims of redlining and segregation. Our nation's failure to equitably deliver health care and social services to Black communities, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in a disproportionate number of unnecessary deaths. We cannot accept the best parts of our history without acknowledging our nation's involvement in the worst.

"Changing systems and cultures requires that tough decisions be made. Maintaining the status quo is far easier than tackling change. I pledge to lean into those changes no matter the discomfort it brings. I call on our community to join me in ensuring that we do not fall back on these commitments. Our lives and our humanity depend on us holding true to these promises and each other."

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