



February 19, 2020

Mayor Jenny Durkan  
 600 Fourth Avenue  
 Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Mayor Durkan,

We are a diverse group of community leaders, business organizations, social service providers, community and neighborhood advocates, and civil rights activists who share a commitment to finding effective solutions to engage and help people who commit low-level offenses due to mental illness, substance use and extreme poverty. We support the nationally recognized Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Program (LEAD) program as a robust set of practices that are rooted in proactive engagement and have been the focus of several rigorous evaluations. We write to ask you to allocate immediately the full city funding for LEAD that was included in the 2020 supplemental budget adopted by the Seattle City Council and signed by you in November 2019, in order to stabilize and enhance the program and lay the foundation for sustainable growth. In addition to passing the budget, the City Council unanimously passed a resolution to bring the LEAD program to scale by 2023, thereby leveraging a private grant of \$1.5 million to support the intervention.

LEAD is a collaborative effort that brings together a diverse array of systems including law enforcement, prosecution and social services to find more effective ways to address behavioral health needs than

overuse of jail and prison. Many of our organizations have direct experience working with LEAD, or have followed the development and implementation of this approach in our community closely. We have found the program model to be transparent and participatory throughout its existence, making its approach visible and accessible. It has achieved an unprecedented level of coordination and dialogue between police officers and social service providers, and fostered cooperation and developed mutual respect among sectors that previously had difficulty working effectively together in a sustained way.

The program has been embraced and used appropriately by law enforcement and neighborhood groups, but caseworkers are overloaded, limiting the ability to respond to the volume of referrals, affecting the quality of skilled care participants receive, and making it difficult to hire and retain the staff required to sustain this model. During the budget process, Seattle City Councilmembers heard testimony from multiple LEAD partners, staff, and participants about the program's effectiveness, and the additional demand for services. They added \$3.5 million to the \$2.6 million in your budget to sustain and expand the LEAD program. As we understand it, Councilmembers chose to make this additional investment because they saw it as necessary to sustain and build upon the program, and respond to the current mismatch between referrals and program capacity.

Not releasing the full amount of funding (\$6.1 million) would have serious effects on the current level of services provided and undermine the ability to accept new referrals and expand into southeast and southwest Seattle. These funds are needed to increase the number of case managers to match anticipated referrals, and to open and equip case management work spaces to support outreach and case management in the North, East and South precincts (the flagship REACH office is in the West precinct, not readily reachable for clients and officers in the other precincts). These funds are also essential to complete the LEAD database that permits operational partners to share information, and procure data reports on demand.

We should all be proud of the high level of engagement of multiple organizations that have a stake in transforming how Seattle responds to complex and critical issues. This community is committed to thoughtful and effective measures that will improve our collective health and safety. We see the LEAD program as one of the best and most widely supported sets of tools we have to respond to problem behaviors by people who do not belong in, and will not respond well to, jail or the criminal legal system. That is why we are eager to see the program stabilized, strengthened and spread, without further delay.

We are and will remain engaged in robust public dialogue about the LEAD program approach and the issues it is designed to address. We welcome every opportunity to work together with each other and with elected officials in Seattle and King County toward our shared goals for our region. And, we write to you out of a sense of urgency to support this remarkably well-supported approach.

Sincerely,

**ACLU-WA**

**Alliance for Pioneer Square**

**Chief Seattle Club**

**Civil Survival**

**Community House Mental Health Agency**

**Community Passageways**

**DESC**

**Downtown Seattle Association**

**Evergreen Treatment Services**

**Friends of the Waterfront Seattle**

**GSBA: Washington's LGBTQ & Allied Chamber of Commerce**

**Highland Park Action Coalition**

**Low Income Housing Institution**

**Not This Time**

**Real Change Homelessness Empowerment Project**

**Seattle Community Police Commission**

**Seattle Human Services Coalition**

**Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness**

**SEIU Healthcare 1199NW**

**Socialist Alternative**