

PIERCE COUNTY

Office of the County Council



February XX, 2021

The Honorable Christine Rolfes, 23rd LD State Senator
The Honorable Timm Ormsby, 3rd LD State Representative
Washington State Capitol
Olympia, WA 98503

Dear Senator Rolfes and Representative Ormsby,

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has greatly exacerbated crisis conditions that already existed around housing and homelessness, particularly for our homeless youth. **We are writing today to ask you to preserve the state operating funding for the Arlington Drive Campus for Homeless Youth and Young Adults in Tacoma of \$4.25 M for the biennium. The Governor's budget requests \$1.25 M for the biennium for operations and supportive services and that is woefully inadequate for this essential regional asset serving Pierce, South King, Kitsap, Thurston, Lewis, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, and Clark County youth.**

For the 2021 Legislative Session, leaders in both chambers of the legislature signaled they would prioritize a focus on COVID-19 response, economic recovery, addressing systemic racism, and climate change. We believe Arlington Drive fits squarely within these priorities and that full funding of the campus should be maintained. The persistent issue of youth homelessness and housing instability has grown exponentially worse during the pandemic and has roots in the broader economic and racial inequities of both economic recovery and opportunity even in normal times.

This project is led by the Tacoma Housing Authority (THA), and as a testament to Arlington's value, all levels of government contributed to the \$25 million construction costs. The State invested \$5 million; City of Tacoma invested \$2.8 million; and Pierce County invested \$670,000. The remaining funds came mostly from private sources: tax credit investors, commercial debt, and THA. THA also provides the operating funds for ongoing property management, and operating funds for its supportive services have come from the State. In 2020, for that purpose, the legislature appropriated \$1.25 million during the last biennium. **For the coming biennium, the investment needed by the State is \$2.125 million a year, or \$4.25million for the full biennium. We ask the legislature to preserve this measure of funding.**

We are pleased to report that the capital project finished under budget and ahead of schedule. The 12-bed Crisis Residential Center for homeless youth ages 12 to 17 years opened in June of 2020. In the last quarter of 2020, it has already provided 406 bednights to 41 homeless youth ages 12 to 17 years. Once the pandemic is over and the CRC is up to its full capacity, it will serve over 300 youth a year. The 58-unit apartment building for homeless young adults ages 18 to 24 years opened in November 2020. It is now fully leased up. 47% of the homeless young adults are parents with babies or toddlers. At any one time, that apartment building will house over 100 persons.

Arlington Drive is also necessary for the region's continuum of services for homeless young people. It is not an overnight shelter and is not a replacement for overnight shelters, which remain crucial. Instead, Arlington Drive is a necessary next stop for homeless young people referred by shelters to begin their transition to a stable life.

Notably, Arlington's 12-bed Crisis Residential Center is the only crisis housing option in the region that specifically addresses the needs of homeless youth ages 12 to 17. Without it, the most vulnerable members of the community are left with nowhere to go. The project is also a nationally unique partnership formed between THA and two of the nation's top providers of social services to homeless youth: Community Youth Services and the Y Social Impact Center, a division of the YMCA of Greater Seattle. Arlington Drive is a regional asset serving young people in crisis throughout the Puget Sound and Southwest Washington. Since it opened, 17% of the young people came from counties other than Pierce County. This project presents our state with the opportunity to show how to do this difficult work well, and at scale. **We are immensely grateful to the State for its support.**

We know the State, along with all our cities and counties, face serious budget challenges because of the pandemic. We know you will receive many requests to preserve funding this session, and we respectfully ask that you maintaining this commitment to Arlington Drive which constitutes a prudent use of public funds and is the right choice for many reasons; here are a few we hope you will consider:

1. Preserving State Investments While Saving Money in Averted Other Costs

The operating funding will protect the nearly **\$7 million investment the State, the City and the County have already made to build Arlington Drive**. Without these crucial State operating dollars, Arlington Drive will stand empty of the homeless young people that the state, the City, and the County invested to serve with significant capital funds. Spending the appropriated funds will also save in averted costs that will arise from the other services young people will need if they cannot get housing and services at Arlington Drive, especially if they get sick with COVID-19.

2. Compounding Crises: Youth and Young Adult Homelessness During the Pandemic

Thousands of youth and young adults are homeless in Washington State and face greatly increased risks of violence, sexual exploitation, substance dependency, and lifelong poverty. They have diminished chances of an education, a reasonable adolescence/adulthood, livelihood, a family, and a life without fear. **The pandemic has exponentially worsened their risk.**

Housing is necessary for both personal and public health. Most traditional shelters are closed to homeless youth or are unsafe for them to access. This forces them to find shelter and safety in groups without prospect for social distancing or hygiene or guidance. They face still greater risks when they trade sex for shelter.

3. Arlington Drive Campus: A Solution at Scale

Arlington Drive's Crisis Residential Center/HOPE facility for homeless youth age 12 to 17 years (12 beds) Community Youth Services (CYS) administers the facility and a premier provider doing this work. Its service model has a **91% rate of success in discharging youth to stable housing after an average 15 day stay**. At that rate, Arlington Drive's CRC will serve and save over 300 homeless youth every year.

Arlington Drive will have 58 apartments for homeless young adults age 18 to 24 years.

About 30% will have babies or toddlers. The Y's Social Impact Center provides the extensive services they need and is a national leader in this work. Its evidence-based model redirects these young people to a safer and sustainable adulthood. When they leave, they will take a THA housing voucher with them.

4. A Regional Asset

Arlington Drive will serve young people throughout the Puget Sound region, and beyond, who find their way to Pierce County seeking help. Homeless young people roam, fleeing danger, seeking help, and going astray. The campus will allow Pierce County youth to stay close to home which reduces their trauma and increases their chance of reuniting with family. Pierce County youth will not take up space in the other counties' shelters, allowing those other counties to serve their own youth. **Since it opened, 17% of the young people admitted to Arlington Drive came from other counties, including King, Kitsap, Thurston, Clark, and Mason.**

5. An Investment in Equity

Arlington Drive will help address the grievous inequities that result in youth of color and LGBTQ+ youth disproportionately experiencing homelessness when compared to their percentage of the overall population. Without effective intervention, their homelessness promises to perpetuate these disparities into a population of adult homelessness. Arlington Drive interrupts this inherited inequity. This disparity shows in the young people admitted to Arlington Drive since it opened:

- Crisis Residential Center: 48% are youth of color.
- Apartments for young adults: 75% are young adults of color; 37.5% LGBTQ.

6. A Behavioral Health Investment

Homeless youth and young adults show high rates of trauma, mental illness, and substance dependency. They need professional services and will get them at Arlington Drive. Arlington Drive is part of a continuum of services that includes: Family Preservation and Reconciliation, Foster Care, Behavioral Health, Residential Treatment, Substance Use Disorder Treatment, and in-Patient Treatment. Critically, they will get the housing stability necessary to make these services accessible and effective.

We know you face hard choices ahead. We hope this helps you understand that preserving the \$4.25 million funding for Arlington Drive is an important and necessary choice that will help preserve the health of our youth and the resilience of our entire community.

Sincerely,

Cc: All Pierce County Legislators
All Members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee
All Members of the House Appropriations Committee