



MONROE CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Bill No. 20-006

SUBJECT:	Presentation: Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney Adam Cornell – Support of Felony Drug Charges; 2 Grams or Less Policy
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DATE:	DEPT:	CONTACT:	PRESENTER:	ITEM:
1/21/2020	Executive	Deborah Knight	Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney Adam Cornell	Presentation Item #1

Discussion: 9/17/2019; 12/03/2019; 1/21/2020

Attachments: 1. Letter of support to Executive Somers and the County Council dated 9/17/2019

REQUESTED ACTION: None – presentation only.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

On September 24, 2019, the City Council authorized Mayor Thomas to sign a letter to Executive Somers and the County Council supporting the Innovative Justice Initiative proposed by the Snohomish County Prosecutor's Office. This agenda bill reports on the outcome of the requested support.

DESCRIPTION/BACKGROUND

In May of 2019, Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney Adam Cornell presented his Innovative Justice Initiative. Rooted in the principle that the enforcement of felony simple possession drug laws should be sensible, fair, compassionate, and firm, with a focus on treatment and accountability. The initiative addressed prosecution of controlled substances cases where the amount in possession is less than 2 grams. The initiative was aimed to reverse the former prosecutor's policy to decline prosecution of 2 gram or less drug cases.

Snohomish County Prosecuting Attorney Adam Cornell will speak to Council regarding the approved funds allocated in the 2020 budget that support reversing the 2 gram threshold for felony drug prosecutions.

The added prosecutor's employees would screen cases as part of Mr. Cornell's Prosecution Crossroads Unit, which manages diversion programs for those willing to seek help with substance abuse and other problems. Those unwilling or unable to get treatment could face jail or prison time.

FISCAL IMPACTS

N/A

TIME CONSTRAINTS

N/A

ALTERNATIVES TO REQUESTED ACTION

N/A



September 17, 2019

Snohomish County Executive Dave Sommers
Snohomish County Councilmember Nate Nehring (District 1)
Snohomish County Councilmember Brian Sullivan (District 2)
Snohomish County Councilmember Stephanie Wright (District 3)
Snohomish County Councilmember Terry Ryan (District 4)
Snohomish County Councilmember Sam Low (District 5)

Esteemed Executive and Council:

The City of Monroe council enthusiastically and unanimously support the Snohomish Prosecutor's Office with their *Innovative Justice Initiative*; a reversal of a policy that basically de-criminalized possession of less than 2 grams of felony-level drugs such as heroin, methamphetamine and cocaine. Enforcement and subsequent treatment and prosecution of felony-level simple possession cases are key to reducing relapse and attacking the addiction problem at its root cause.

The enforcement of these simple possession cases should be fair, compassionate and firm; our communities expect it. Drug usage drives other criminal activity, ranging from thefts and burglaries to assaults and homicides. Persons with addictions must feed that addiction and turn to crime for that purpose. This "ripple effect" on our city increases homelessness, property crime to sustain use, and increased Law Enforcement and jail costs. Often our police officers encounter individuals who have less than two grams of a controlled substance which no longer meets the standard for a felony arrest. Since the county does not prosecute these as felonies, the City of Monroe must choose to prosecute, but is limited to only misdemeanors charges resulting in the cost being borne by the City for court services to include prosecution, public defense, and possible incarceration. Subsequently, our police department is not able to adequately address the root causes of why some people are engaging in criminal behavior. This is why the City of Monroe council supports this initiative. Get the people the help they need - at the lowest possible level of prosecution - to reduce crime and aid in recovery.

We all understand the fiscal impacts of a program such as the *Innovative Justice Initiative*; it is expensive to add staffing and it can't be done piece-meal or on a temporary basis; the cost of employees is ongoing. That said, the costs associated with not getting low-level drug offenders into treatment or other alternatives to incarceration by far exceeds the cost of employees. Untreated or under-served low level offenders

continue to victimize the community and stay on their course of self-destruction. When one compares the cost of staff with the cost to the community, the answer is clear.

The City of Monroe council resolutely encourages the elected policy makers of our county to support the *Innovative Justice Initiative*. Reversing the policy regarding not charging less-than-2-grams of drugs and adding the requisite staff in the Snohomish Prosecutor's office will help our officers as they work diligently to keep the City of Monroe a safe and secure place to be.

Thank you for your continued service and we look forward to taking this step with you.

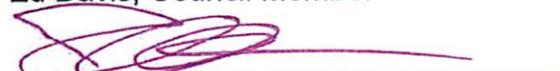
Sincerely,



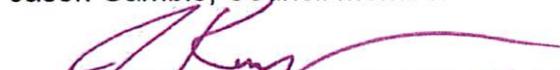
Patsy Cudaback, Council Member



Ed Davis, Council Member



Jason Gamble, Council Member



Jim Kamp, Council Member



Kevin Hanford, Council Member



Jeff Rasmussen, Council Member



Kirk Scarboro, Council Member