

Mayors and Business Leaders for Public Safety

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Snohomish County Mayors' Statement on Latest *Blake* Proposal *Coalition urges "no" vote on SB 5536*

EVERETT — April 23, 2023 — The latest proposal to resolve the state's drug possession laws in response to the state Supreme Court's *Blake* decision does not provide the necessary tools to effectively address public safety challenges in Snohomish County, according to the four mayors leading the Mayors and Business Leaders for Public Safety coalition.

The coalition is urging Snohomish County lawmakers to vote "no" on [Senate Bill 5536](#).

In reviewing the latest draft of the bill, coalition steering committee members Everett Mayor Cassie Franklin, Marysville Mayor Jon Nehring, Lake Stevens Mayor Brett Gailey and Sultan Mayor Russell Wiita believe the proposal does not go far enough to prioritize or incentivize treatment options and does little to help local governments solve what has become the most critical issue facing Washington's communities.

"At this time, we would ask that Snohomish County legislators vote 'no' on Senate Bill 5536 and give local governments the authority to address issues related to drug possession, public drug use and treatment incentives in their own jurisdictions. We continue to believe that a meaningful solution must effectively balance legal consequences and treatment options to reverse the impacts of *Blake*, and that the current version of the legislation falls short of that test.

"We share the view of others, including our partners in law enforcement, that the conference report condones and facilitates drug use by authorizing local governments to distribute 'smoking equipment' and 'other public health supplies.' This is counterproductive in our view and will encourage, rather than reduce the use of illegal drugs. Additional language calling for 'safe consumption' that must be 'open to youth as well as adults' moves us backward in terms of addressing drug possession and substance use disorders and leaves vulnerable youth susceptible to trafficking and other criminal activity.

"We also take issue with the language in Section 9, which could potentially open the door for defendants to have their charges dismissed without completing treatment or abiding by the recommendations of their substance use disorder assessments.

“We have other concerns about this conference report, but the bottom line is, the bill, in its present form, would do more harm than good in addressing drug use in our communities, and we cannot support it going forward.

“At the start of the session, we were optimistic that the Legislature would enact a balanced measure that would provide meaningful changes to our drug possession laws and provide law enforcement and prosecutors the mechanisms they need to address the drug issues that are consuming our communities. The original version of SB 5536 was a meaningful step in that direction.

“The 16 Snohomish County communities represented by this coalition remain united in their efforts to reverse the impact of our current drug laws fueling criminal activity, vandalism, property crime and worse. But the solutions proposed in the current version of SB 5536 will not sufficiently curb these activities, and we believe that local ordinances tailored to the needs of our communities will be more effective than the proposal now before lawmakers.

“We appreciate the hard work that has gone into the conference report to resolve this issue before the end of session. Unfortunately, we cannot support SB 5536 in its current form and urge a ‘no’ vote.”

To learn more about the coalition, visit keepourcitysafe.com.