



# Empower City Councils to Address Public Safety, Criminal Justice, & Behavioral Health

## The Challenge:

Members of our community have expressed that public safety is their top concern.

The City of Kent is working hard to **create a safer community through investments in alternative responses, community court, and accountable and transparent policing**. However - there are limitations to what the City can accomplish within existing resources.  
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## The Solution:

The Kent City Council is committed to funding public safety by implementing a local tax – however, state law does not provide the council with that local option. The City asks the state to act urgently – in 2024 – so that the Kent City Council can effectively help residents feel safe at home, at work, in parks and public spaces, and at retail establishments. Under current law, cities and counties are authorized to increase sales taxes to fund public safety with voter approval. Kent joins the Association of Washington Cities in asking the Legislature to allow city councils the option to impose a .3% sales tax to fund public safety in counties and cities that have not yet imposed the tax. The tax would amount to 3 cents on a \$10 purchase.

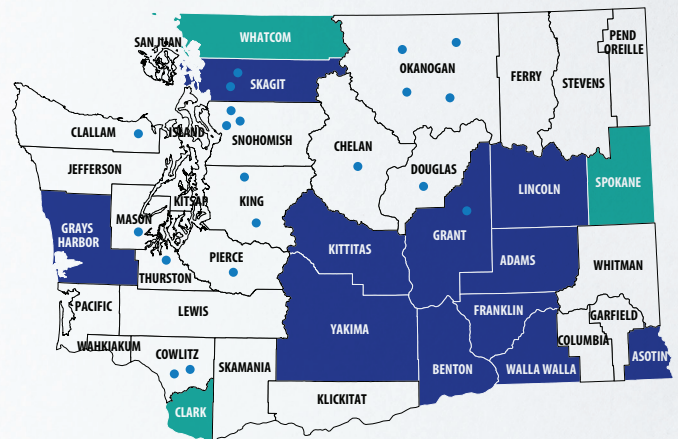
**“This amounts to 3 cents on a \$10 purchase.”**

Revenues generated from the tax can be spent for public safety purposes, which include not only policing, but also courts, prosecutors, public defenders, and programs to reduce the number of people interacting with the criminal justice system.

The Kent City Council hears consistently the need to “just do something” to increase public safety. Unfortunately, the tools available are insufficient to address the problem. Even if voters approved a property tax levy, the funding available from a levy would be insufficient to address current needs. It would take almost a year before the City would receive revenue to improve public safety, almost two years before sufficient funds were available to hire officers, and then another six months for officers to complete the academy. This timeline does not reflect the urgent need to address the devastating rise in crime in cities across the state. Putting a measure on the ballot

would cost the City \$160,000 – or the cost of one or more employees. For these reasons, the Kent City Council asks the Legislature to empower them to lead the community and generate the resources necessary to “just do something.” If approved, the sales tax would generate approximately \$12 million. Of that, the law requires 15% of the revenue generated to be allocated to King County, leaving the City with \$10.2 million to improve public safety.

### Cities/Counties with Imposed Tax



\*Counties shaded purple have imposed a .3% sales tax with voter approval.

\*Counties shaded in teal have imposed a .1% sales tax with voter approval.

\*Blue dots indicate the number of cities within a county that have imposed a .1% sales tax with voter approval. If the city is within a county that has imposed the .3%, a portion of the .3% is dedicated to the city (it is not additive).

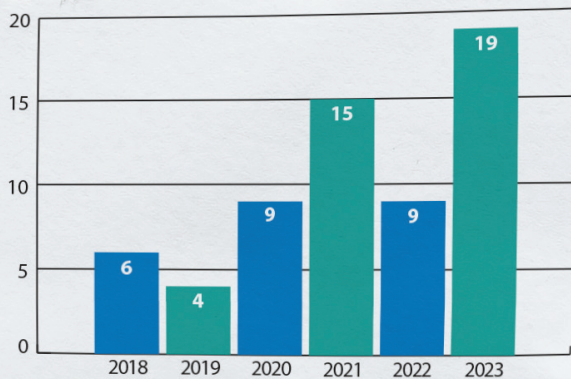


## The Challenge *(CONTINUED)*:

### Unprecedented Rise in Crime

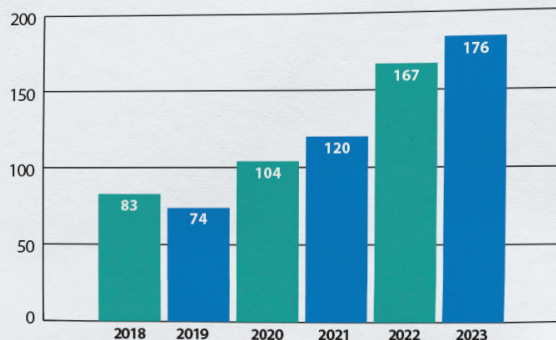
The community's concerns around public safety are supported by data. Washington state is experiencing an unprecedented rise in crime. Since 2020, homicides have nearly doubled – from 201 in 2019, to 394 in 2022. The 2023 numbers are expected to exceed previous numbers. Other crimes also on the rise include robbery, vehicle theft, and aggravated assaults. Kent's crime statistics are consistent with this statewide trend. Below is data on the number of homicides and aggravated assaults in Kent in recent years.

#### Homicides: 2018 through October 2023



*The number of homicides vary greatly from year to year, but the last four years have seen a deeply concerning increase.*

#### Aggravated Assaults: 2018 through October 2023



*The number of aggravated assault cases has been on a steady rise since 2019, as has the corresponding crime rate.*

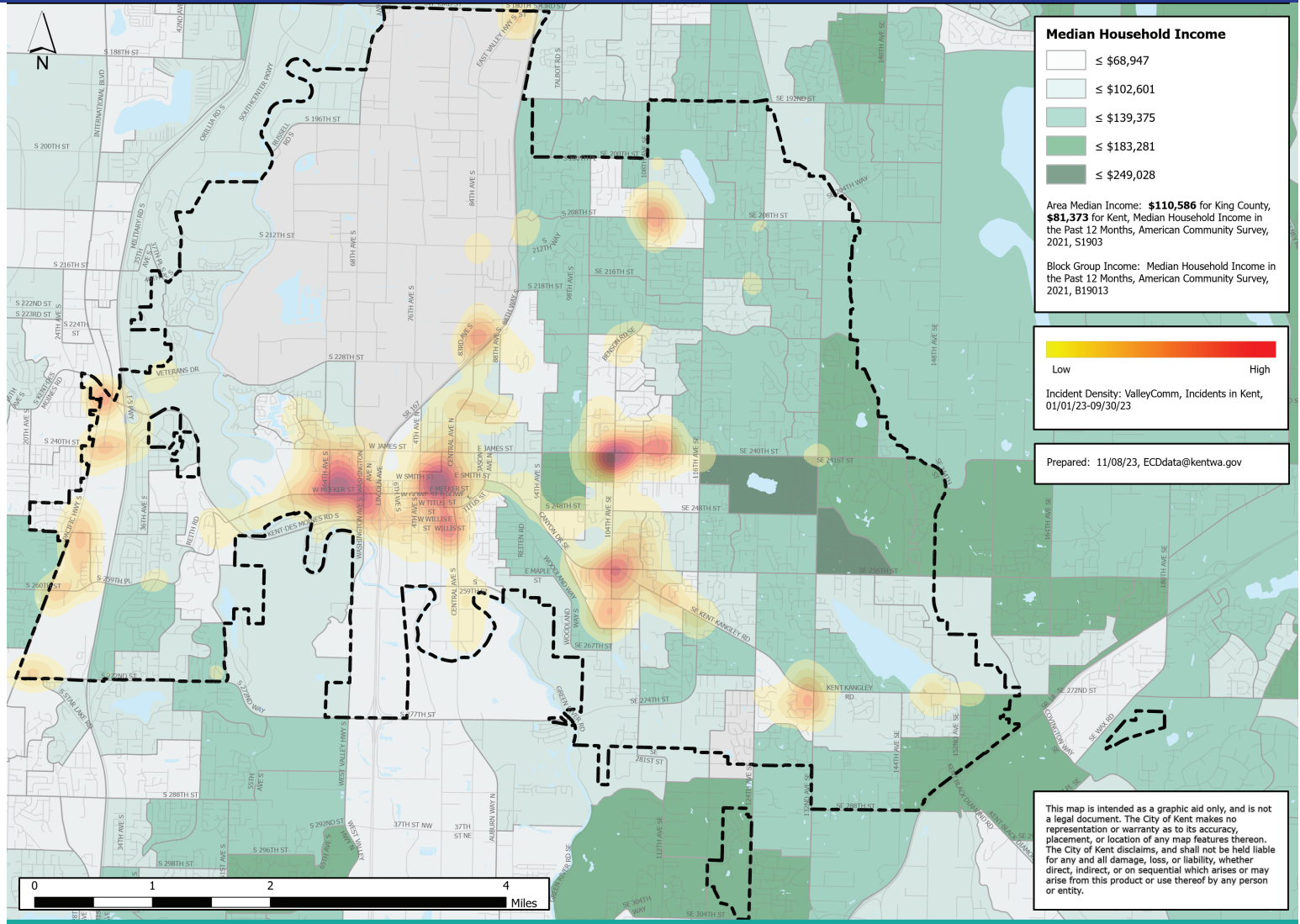
### Washington's Number of Officers per 1,000 Residents is Below the National Average

While crime is rising across the state, the number of officers on a per capita basis in Washington remains well below other states. The national average number of officers per 1,000 residents is 2.31. Washington's average is 1.36 officers per 1,000 residents. Kent's numbers are more stark, with 1.20 officers per 1,000 residents. The table below shows other Washington cities and the number of officers per 1,000 residents.

City	Population	Sworn	Officer per 1k
Everett	110812	201	1.81
Lynnwood	40592	70	1.72
Seattle	733919	1200	1.64
Tacoma	219205	336	1.53
Spokane	229071	346	1.51
Federal Way	101131	137	1.35
Des Moines	32689	44	1.35
Auburn	85699	115	1.34
Bellingham	92289	120	1.30
Olympia	55919	70	1.25
Bellevue	149440	186	1.24
Vancouver	192169	236	1.23
Renton	105179	129	1.23
Kent	137900	166	1.20
Kirkland	92107	108	1.17
Redmond	76354	78	1.02



# Median Income & Crime Incidents in Kent, WA



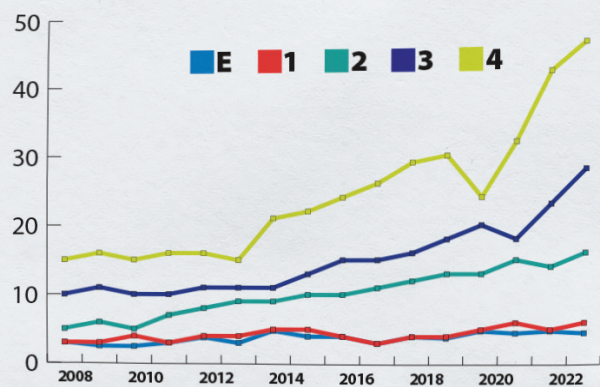
Kent's most diverse neighborhoods with affordable housing are experiencing the highest levels of criminal activity. [Kent is one of the nation's most culturally diverse communities, with approximately 130 languages spoken and a large immigrant and refugee population.](#) Over half of Kent's homicide victims this year were of diverse populations, and over half of those cases had a drug or robbery nexus.

In the graph below, the E stands for "Emergency" which are the highest priority calls, while the P stands for "priority" with P1 incidents being a higher priority than others. The response times for E and P1 incidents has changed very little. However around 2013, then again in 2020, the response times for P2 - P4 incidents saw dramatic slowdowns. [Staffing levels likely played a part in both changes, along with the impact of Covid and police policy changes in 2020.](#)

There are new and growing demands that require additional time and resources for public safety partners.

- **De-Escalation Takes Time:** Best practices for responding to incidents requires more time with suspects, and the increase in incidents with mental health-related overtones requires more officers. One of the most effective tenets of de-escalation is slowing situations down, which means police officers respond to fewer calls in the same number of hours. Additionally, research shows that dispatching more officers to calls leads to incidents being resolved with no or lower levels of force. Adequate police staffing is required to support de-escalation and ensure that when someone calls 9-1-1 there is a timely and effective response.

Yearly Average Response Times: 2008 - 2023





## Key Investments Made in Public Safety

The City of Kent is committed to providing public safety in a thoughtful, accountable, and transparent manner.

- **Response Times Due to High Priority Calls:** Call response times for high priority calls are over double what they were 5 years ago due to an increase in violent crimes and the number of officers required to respond.
- **Investigative Challenges:** Police investigations take longer than they once did. The increase in firearm-related calls requires additional investigative efforts, such as conducting shell casing identification to tie firearms to other crime. With the advent of smart phones, ring cameras, social media, GPS (cell phone pings), and other digital evidence, police departments must have digital forensic detectives and evidence technicians who download and analyze cell phones, hard drives, and surveillance footage. They also scan and process crime scenes with technical equipment to meet the high standards for admissibility of evidence in court. This generally requires multiple search warrants and equates to more resource-intensive investigations.
- **Supervisors Stretched Thin:** Supervisors are a key component to compliance with new regulations and police accountability (e.g. supervisors are responsible for investigating uses of force, ensuring pursuits are initiated in accordance with the law, responding to citizen inquiries, etc.). Ideally, a supervisor should oversee four officers. Because of a lack of resources, supervisors are overseeing nearly double that in Kent.
- **Increased Workloads for Public Defenders and Prosecutors:** The state has reclassified several crimes, including possession of controlled substances, as misdemeanors. This has shifted public defense and prosecutorial costs from counties to cities and requires additional resources.
- **Community Policing:** The City's community engagement unit is half of what is once was. The City is unable to adequately staff community events and festivals, causing a reduction in events and activities.
- The City of Kent has partnered with FD CARES to bring mental health professionals to 9-1-1 call responses.
- Kent was one of the state's first communities to adopt body-worn cameras and is in the process of implementing dash cameras.
- Kent's police department (KPD) and jail are accredited agencies through the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, which is designated by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) as a qualified accrediting agency.
- Kent led the development of the state's first Law Enforcement Training and Community Safety Act's compliance processes and procedures for officer-involved uses of deadly force.
- KPD has adopted the Attorney General's Model Use of Force Policy.
- Kent is one of the few agencies that has deployed a system for gathering demographic data related to officer discretionary stops.
- Kent has dedicated opioid settlement funding to provide drug and associated mental health treatment free of charge to individuals who participate in its Community Court. The City also operates a DUI court.
- The City has utilized red-light cameras, school zones cameras, and other technologies to reduce officer interactions and provide more coverage.
- Kent has instituted the state's only Community Immersion Law Enforcement Project, where newly hired officers are paired with community service organizations (e.g. World Relief, YMCA, and Vine Place Maple) to perform 320 hours of service as a way to develop relationships with the community before they enter the law enforcement training academy. More than 40 Kent police recruits have completed the program and independent research confirms its positive results.
- KPD redesigned its recruiting process and significantly increased the diversity of newly hired officers. The department has increased hiring diversity by 53%, including setting a record for female officers.
- KPD acquired DOJ grant funding to work with Restore Assemble Produce (RAP) on a Youth Participatory Action Research Project. Over the course of the last year, KPD officers have worked with RAP to develop a youth-focused DEI Strategic Plan. That plan will be evaluated, modified as needed, and then implemented in 2024.

Kent requests legislation that will allow city councils the option to impose a .3% sales tax to fund public safety in counties and cities that have not yet imposed a public safety tax.

