

# Low Income Priority Hire Program Moving Forward

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The King County Council has passed legislation establishing a low-income priority hiring program to provide family-wage construction jobs in economically distressed areas. The legislation builds on efforts by both the council and County Executive Dow Constantine to improve access to employment and training programs for workers in need of family-wage jobs. The hire program is intended to prioritize King County's economically disadvantaged local workers for inclusion on county capital construction projects through state-recognized apprenticeship programs.

"The creation of a permanent King County priority hire program is a good step in ensuring that our economically distressed residents can begin to benefit from the booming construction industry that has taken root here," said Councilmember Larry Gossett.

The program will concentrate on providing opportunities for employment for county residents on county construction projects greater than \$15 million. It will focus on primarily King County communities that by ZIP code are in the top 30% of the county in two of the following three categories:

- Have unemployment levels of eight percent or higher,
- Have more than 28 percent of residents at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and
- Where over 70 percent of residents 25 years old or older have no college degree.

"We are connecting people in the most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods to family-wage construction jobs that will build the future of our region," said Constantine. "King County infrastructure projects will now provide opportunities for more people who live in underserved communities to grab that first rung of the economic ladder."

Contractors who enter into agreements on county capital construction projects will consent to making a percentage of the residents living in these ZIP codes, who have the requisite skills, a priority when hiring for the project.

“Construction is an industry in which hardworking people can get access to a well-paying career, but what we have seen over the past twenty years is that access has only been granted to certain populations,” said Council Vice Chair Rod Dembowski. “Today’s legislation uplifts historically underinvested neighborhoods, giving residents and communities a pathway out of poverty.”

This legislation also commits the county to collaborating with programs that focus on increasing the number of people with the skills needed to work on these projects. The county will partner with pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship training programs to encourage programs, classes and curriculum focused on the construction trades.

The county will also work toward providing technical assistance to women-owned or minority-owned businesses, small contractor and supplier firms and open shop contractors on the recruitment and reporting requirements of the priority hire program to promote participation in the priority hire program.

“The communities targeted are home to the most disenfranchised peoples and people of color are disproportionately represented in those areas. Because of institutionalized racism and sexism and I-200, women and minorities have continued to be excluded from the construction trades,” said Gossett. “It is King County’s responsibility to step up to ensure that we provide equal opportunities on our public works projects and Priority Hire does that in Martin Luther King, Jr County.”