

KING COUNTY PROSECUTING ATTORNEY'S OFFICE



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PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

JUSTICE  
COMPASSION  
PROFESSIONALISM  
INTEGRITY  
LEADERSHIP

November 13, 2024

The Hon. Bob Ferguson  
Washington State Attorney General  
Attorney General  
PO Box 40100  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0100

**Re: Request for a formal Attorney General Opinion on the ability of counties to operate training academies for local corrections officers**

Dear Attorney General Ferguson:

The purpose of this letter is to request your opinion on an important question relating to basic corrections officer training academies.

King County, like other counties in Washington state, is facing historic difficulties both in hiring corrections officers, and, once hired, in obtaining space in the state-operated basic corrections officer academy to properly train and certify new hires so that they can staff our jail facilities. As such, I am requesting your opinion on the following question:

May counties operate and administer their own basic corrections officer training academies to both train and certify new corrections officers in accordance with standards established by the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC)?

Your answer to this question would greatly assist counties in determining whether they possess the authority to train and certify their own corrections officers in order to meet severe staffing challenges.

As you know, counties in Washington State fund and operate jail facilities. Toward this purpose, under RCW 43.101.220(1), county corrections officers must engage in basic corrections training that complies with standards adopted by the CJTC: "The corrections personnel of the state and all counties and municipal corporations initially employed on or after January 1, 1982, shall

engage in basic corrections training *which complies with standards adopted by the commission.*” (Emphasis added).


Although this statute requires the CJTC to provide such training, it does not preclude the ability of counties to conduct their own training in accordance with CJTC standards. Unlike the statute charging the CJTC with basic *law enforcement* training responsibilities, the basic *corrections officer* training statute does not designate the CJTC as the sole source provider for corrections officer training. Compare RCW 43.101.200 (providing that “the commission shall provide the aforementioned training *and shall have the sole authority to do so*” for law enforcement officers) with RCW 43.101.220(2) (providing that the “commission shall provide the training required in this section” for corrections officers). If the Legislature had intended the CJTC to have the sole authority to provide corrections training and certification, it would have included the “sole authority” language that is found in the law enforcement training statute.

When counties hire new prospective corrections officers, the training and certification of these officers at CJTC-operated academies becomes a substantial choke point. Due to the so-called “gray wave” and the “great resignation” resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic, corrections officer shortages have grown to critical levels; however, the corrections officer training programs offered by the CJTC are not meeting the urgent needs that King County and other counties have for new corrections officers. Even without continuing attrition, it would take King County many years to bring its jails to full staffing given existing CJTC resources. The inadequacy of existing training resources is further compounded by the substantial wait times before corrections officer training slots become available. For many counties, either alone or in concert with other counties, the option to supplement CJTC training with CJTC-compliant, county-run academies would be an important step for meeting the staffing challenges in our jails.

Of course, I want to emphasize that any county-operated academy would operate within CJTC standards in order to graduate competent and certified corrections officers. In King County, we are confident in our ability to satisfy these standards; in fact, existing King County corrections officers already teach at the CJTC basic corrections academy and are integral to its operation. In addition, we would like to pursue a regional academy approach by partnering with other neighboring counties to train and certify officers for facilities throughout the Puget Sound region.

We look forward to your answer to this important question.

Sincerely,

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LEESA MANION  
King County Prosecutor