Resolution on
Improving Access to and Safety Around the King County Courthouse in Seattle

Approved by the Board of Trustees
September 20, 2017

WHEREAS, the mission of the King County Bar Association (KCBA) includes offering input on matters of public policy; and

WHEREAS, the King County Courthouse was opened in 1916 and currently houses the King County Council, King County Superior Court, King County District Court, King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, King County Sheriff’s Office, King County Department of Judicial Administration, King County Law Library, and King County Work Release; and

WHEREAS, the Courthouse originally had three public entrances; the main entrance being on Jefferson Street and additional entrances on Third Avenue and Fourth Avenue; and

WHEREAS, the Jefferson Street entrance was closed during a remodel in 1967, leaving the Third and Fourth Avenue entrances; and

WHEREAS, at the end of 2016 for budgetary reasons, the Fourth Avenue entrance was closed, leaving only the Third Avenue entrance open for street level general public access to the facility; and

WHEREAS, in recent years, there have been increased incidents of improper behavior around the Courthouse, including reports of rocks and wine bottles being thrown at the building's windows from the nearby park, a bullet being fired into a judge's chambers drug dealing and encampments established at the park, human waste around the perimeter of the building, and occasional assaults against jurors and courthouse employees; and

WHEREAS, a majority of these incidents occur in City Hall Park directly south of and on the Third Avenue side of the Courthouse; and

WHEREAS, many of King County lawyers and their staffs, public officials and employees, judicial officers and their staffs, and members of the public access the Courthouse every day; and

WHEREAS, the types of improper behaviors listed above pose a potential safety issue to the persons utilizing the Courthouse, and may adversely impact the King County judicial and governmental systems; and
WHEREAS, any solution to these problems must take reasonable steps possible to address the underlying societal and individual circumstances that contribute to this situation (e.g., mentally disabled, drug dependent, and homeless people who have nowhere to go); and

WHEREAS, King County leaders have begun to take initial steps to address the improper behavior listed above, including a more visible presence around the perimeter of the Courthouse and improving sanitary facilities, and have convened government agency officials from the city and county, along with nonprofit service providers, to review longer term solutions;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the King County Bar Association calls on the Metropolitan King County Council to:

A. Continue its efforts to improve the safety and cleanliness of the areas directly adjacent to the Courthouse, including joint efforts by inter-governmental agencies and non-profit service providers to address long term underlying societal and individual circumstances, and

B. Reopen the Fourth Avenue entrance to the Courthouse so the public can resume use of two street-level entrances, which has previously helped reduce incidents of improper behavior impacting persons accessing the Courthouse.