March 16, 2009

The Honorable Ross Hunter, Chair
Finance Committee, House of Representatives
Washington State Legislature
330 John L. O'Brien Building, PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA  98504-0600

Dear Chairman Hunter:

I'm writing to express the strong support of the King County Bar Association for SB5301, which would provide more budgetary flexibility to counties imposing the mental health and chemical dependency sales and use tax. This legislation is scheduled for a hearing before the Committee on Tuesday, March 17.

Founded in 1886, KCBA is the largest voluntary bar association in the state of Washington, with over 5,000 members including attorneys, judges, and law professors. Our mission is to support our diverse membership by promoting a just, collegial, and accessible legal system and profession; working with the judiciary to achieve excellence in the administration of justice; and serving our local community through organized pro bono legal services.

We are speaking out because passage of this legislation is critical to our county's ability to provide adequate funding to its justice system.

Specifically, current law allows counties a local option to implement a 1/10 of one percent sales and use tax for new drug and mental health programs, including therapeutic court services. Current law prohibits use of monies collected to supplant funding for existing programs and services. This bill proposes a short-term responsible removal of the non-supplanting restriction.

Given the dire financial situation facing King County and other counties, KCBA urges adoption of SB5301 so counties have flexibility to maintain essential public safety and court services in this time of crisis.

Kindest Regards.

Sincerely yours,
Andrew J. Prazuch
Executive Director
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