December 12, 2019

The Honorable Jenny Durkan
Mayor of Seattle
600 4th Ave, 7th Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Mayor Durkan:

I am writing to urge your leadership in joining to create a solution to the increasing crime and safety concerns our city faces outside the Third Avenue entrance to the King County Courthouse in Seattle.

The King County Bar Association, founded in 1886, serves over 14,000 lawyers and judges in King County. We are focused on working to achieve excellence, equity, and accessibility in the administration of justice, and I speak out today in support of that mission. KCBA is proud to count you as a longstanding member and supporter of our bar association.

As has been repeatedly documented in recent years, our downtown county courthouse has experienced an increasing number of assaults against jurors, court staff, lawyers, and the public -- 160 separate incidents in the first ten months of this year specifically. The result is that public servants and the general public feel unsafe seeking justice in one of the busiest courthouses in the state.

Earlier this month in response to a lack of progress in inter-governmental discussions aimed at solving the crisis, Superior Court Presiding Judge James Rogers issued an emergency order closing the Third Avenue entrance for the remainder of the year so that public safety could be ensured while city and county officials redoubled their efforts at developing solutions.

While the King County Metropolitan Council on December 11 allocated special funding for extra county law enforcement and human services outside the entrance, we are concerned that King County alone cannot resolve this situation. The City of Seattle shares the responsibility to protect the public from these criminal acts while simultaneously responding with compassion and a helping hand to those individuals who may be engaging in such acts not with criminal intent but due to mental illness or addictions.

I appreciate that you face many challenges on behalf of our city each day. However, given your long history as an officer of the court and champion of access to justice throughout your career, your personal leadership would make a tremendous difference in finding not just temporary "Band-Aid" solutions to this crisis, but instead finding long term solutions. For example, a directive from you that Seattle police officers increase their current patrol of this area would be most welcome. With your leadership, the county and city together can begin to turn around this regrettable situation we now face.
The King County Bar Association stands ready to assist in any way you think would be most useful.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Payseno
2019-2020 President