



Judges Press For New Juvenile And Family Court

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Moldy floors. Smelly drains. Water fountains spouting brown water. These were the highlights of a recent tour of King County's juvenile justice center. Judges and center staff are pressuring King County executive Ron Sims to build a new facility. KUOW's Amy Radil reports.

THE MAIN LOBBY OF THE YOUTH SERVICES CENTER AT 12TH AND ALDER RESEMBLES THE GATE AREA OF A BUSY, OVERCROWDED AIRPORT. ONLY INSTEAD OF WAITING TO BOARD FLIGHTS, PEOPLE ARE WAITING FOR COURTROOMS FOR HEARINGS ON JUVENILE CRIME AND CHILD ABUSE. A WOMAN NAMED CHARNISSE IS SITTING WITH HER BABY AND THREE YEAR OLD TWINS WHILE THEY WAIT FOR A COURT APPEARANCE WITH HER OLDER SON ISAIAH. SHE EXPLAINS HOW HARD IT IS TO KEEP THEM ENTERTAINED...WHEN THERE'S SUDDENLY A TEARING SOUND FROM THE STROLLER.

CHARNISSE: "Oh, he's tearing up the book."

THEY'VE BEEN HERE OVER AN HOUR AND THE KIDS ARE RESTLESS. UNLIKE THE REGIONAL JUSTICE CENTER IN KENT, THIS BUILDING HAS NO CHILDCARE CENTER OR PLAY AREA. CHARNISSE SAYS THEY'RE WAITING HOURS FOR JUST A FEW MINUTES BEFORE THE JUDGE.

CHARNISSE: "And they're only going to do a continuance, so I'm wondering why it takes so long to do a continuance."

IT'S IN THIS CROWDED LOBBY THAT PUBLIC DEFENDERS OFTEN MEET THEIR CLIENTS FOR THE FIRST TIME. THEY SAY THERE'S ALMOST NOWHERE TO HAVE A PRIVATE CONVERSATION BEFORE HEADING INTO COURT. SOCIAL WORKER BEN KAPLAN MEETS WITH KIDS IN THE JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER EVERY DAY. THERE TOO, HE SAYS, THERE'S NO PLACE TO TALK ABOUT THE MOST SENSITIVE ISSUES.

KAPLAN: "There's one room with a door that closes in the visiting room for all the attorneys and the evaluators that work with them and the counselors that work with them."

COURT STAFF SAY THE LACK OF PRIVACY AND CHILDCARE MEANS THAT YOUNG CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED TO INAPPROPRIATE COURTROOM CONFLICTS. LAWYER LINDA LILLEVEK SAYS SHE'S OFTEN WISHED THAT YOUNG KIDS WEREN'T WITNESS TO CERTAIN COURTROOM SCENES.

LILLEVEK: "Or to be honest, checked what I was going to say and think, how can I word this differently or how can I have this child step out of this courtroom."

COURT STAFF SAY THE JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTER HAS INCREASING PHYSICAL PROBLEMS AS WELL.

CONLEY: "Over the stairwell looked like a waterfall."

IN THE DETENTION CENTER, CHIEF KEN CONLEY POINTS TO WHERE WATER GUSHED IN DURING THE HANNUKAH EVE FLOOD IN 2006. HE HAD TO HELP CARRY SOME OF THE EMPLOYEES OUT OF THE BUILDING AGAINST INCOMING WATER.

CONLEY: "So we were carrying them through there to their cars, to their vehicles up in the parking lot..."

THEY'RE STILL CLEANING UP THE MOLD FROM THAT FLOOD. ON A RECENT TOUR, JUDGES AND BUILDING STAFF POINTED OUT OTHER PROBLEMS IN WHAT THEY SAY ARE OUTDATED AND DILAPIDATED WINGS OF THE BUILDING: CORRODING PIPES THAT TURN THE WATER BROWN, SEWER SMELLS, AND PROBLEMS WITH TEMPERATURE CONTROL. COURT STAFF SAY THE SOLUTION IS A NEW FACILITY THAT WOULD BRING FAMILY AND JUVENILE COURTS TOGETHER WITH SERVICES FAMILIES NEED.

KING COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE BRUCE HILYER SAYS HE'S FRUSTRATED ABOUT THE LACK OF PROGRESS TOWARD A NEW FACILITY. HILYER SAYS THEY'VE BEEN TALKING FOR THREE YEARS, BUT KING COUNTY EXECUTIVE RON SIMS HASN'T PUT FORWARD A FUNDING PLAN.

HILYER: "We had hoped it would result in a bond issue this year. At this point the Executive is not supportive of that approach. So we're waiting at this time to see what alternative approaches can be developed, and at this point we don't really know where that effort will end up."

BUT SIMS SAYS A NEW FACILITY IS HIS HIGHEST CAPITAL BUDGET PRIORITY. THE PROPERTY IS JUST BLOCKS FROM SEATTLE UNIVERSITY AND SIMS SAYS THERE COULD BE SOME TYPE OF PARTNERSHIP TO BUILD THE NEW CENTER.

SIMS: "We're going to sit down though because we believe we have an opportunity with Seattle University or another university to say, hold on a second, why don't we treat this and see if we can merge their interests with ours."

SIMS' STAFF SAYS A NEW FACILITY WAS ORIGINALLY ESTIMATED TO COST \$300-\$400 MILLION DOLLARS. THEY SAY HAVING A PARTNER TO FUND HOUSING OR OFFICES COULD HELP BRING DOWN THE COST OF THE PROJECT IN A TIME OF BUDGET CUTS. BUT COUNTY COUNCIL MEMBERS SAY THE IDEA OF A COLLABORATION IS NEWS TO THEM, AND THEY HAVEN'T HEARD OF ANY PROPOSAL TO FINANCE A NEW FAMILY AND JUVENILE COURT.

AMY RADIL, KUOW NEWS.

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