

2019 State of the County  
Executive Bruce Dammeier  
March 20, 2019

### The Pierce County Way

Mr. Chairman, Councilmembers, tribal leaders, County employees, honored guests, and the people of Pierce County, thank you for being here today.

I'd like to especially welcome new council members Dave Morrell and Marty Campbell.

What a beautiful first day of Spring.

But it wasn't that long ago we were up to our necks in snow throughout the County.

Schools closed, thousands lost power, and we declared a state of emergency.

We activated our Emergency Operations Center and our road crews worked around the clock. Crews plowed snow, removed down trees, and helped get the lights back on for Anderson Island and across the peninsulas.

Amazingly, even in these conditions, our mechanics kept our trucks in constant service.

It was exhausting and sometimes dangerous work. And yet, they pushed through. They rose to the challenge.

Maintenance and Operations Division Manager, Bruce Wagner, and some of his road crew and mechanics are here this morning.

We have Nadine Fleming, Steve Freier, Barry Chunn and Curt Carlisle with us.

Our Sheriff's deputies were on the front lines too, rescuing folks who had no business trying to drive in the snow.

And for people who absolutely had to get somewhere, Search and Rescue volunteers with 4x4 vehicles stepped up.

People like Todd Cole, Kim Hann, Karl Moore and Jeff Salzer.

Our volunteers shuttled doctors and nurses to their hospital shifts, 9-1-1 operators to their posts, and patients to their critical chemotherapy and dialysis appointments. The 4x4 volunteers were incredible. They responded to more than 100 requests for transport during the storm.

When snow overwhelmed eastern King County, our Sheriff's deputies rode to the rescue on snowmobiles and the City of Orting Public Works crew showed up with snow-plows.

As I understand from Mark Bethune, the Orting City Administrator, one elderly woman was literally rescued from the snow - not in a car, mind you - but she was actually stuck in the snow!

She walked out of her home and fell in the snow close by. The public works crew heard her cries for help and got her up and back into her warm home. Amazing!

King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert recently thanked me for the support we provided. She told me that, sadly, two people died in the snow. Then she looked me straight in the eye and said, many others would have died without Pierce County's assistance.

I'd like to ask Bruce Wagner and his team, our 4x4 volunteers, our Sheriff deputies, the City of Orting, and our first responders to please stand and be recognized.

The most important thing we do in county government is keep the public safe. Earlier this month, Sheriff Paul Pastor welcomed 21 new deputies to his department.

We're excited to have these law enforcement and corrections deputies join our

team.

In my ride-alongs with our deputies, they tell me their toughest calls involve domestic violence.

These situations are tense.

Unpredictable.

And heartbreaking.

You may have heard about what happened in Parkland last December. A woman named Michelle had to be placed in a medically-induced coma after she was hit by another car in a terrible crash. Doctors say she is lucky to be alive.

Just two days after her estranged husband was served with a restraining order, he got into his car, stepped on the gas and t-boned her at nearly 50 miles per hour.

Her bones were broken.

Her liver was lacerated.

Her car flipped and struck an apartment building so hard four people inside were injured.

We have some of the deputies who helped Michelle on that awful night with us today.

Would you please stand and be recognized? Thank you for being there when we needed you most.

Family violence has no place in Pierce County. We must end it.

In December - with the City of Tacoma, the Crystal Judson Family Justice Center, the YWCA, and others - we launched a partnership to strengthen family violence prevention services throughout Pierce County.

That work is underway and is expected to result in more aligned and innovative approaches to protect our families.

We need better services for survivors and their families, but we also need tougher punishments for abusers. This afternoon, Prosecutor Mary Robnett and I will submit an ordinance to the Council that strengthens penalties for domestic violence witnessed by children. Just seeing such acts traumatizes children and can perpetuate the cycle of violence. This is unacceptable.

I'm thankful our Prosecutor is committed to addressing family violence, and I'm grateful she is adding human trafficking cases to her office's family violence unit. This is another problem we must confront.

Last year alone, 266 people from Washington State called the National Human Trafficking Hotline. We know it is underreported. One-third of the victims are children. And people of color are much more likely to be victimized.

In partnership with Pierce Transit and others, we'll be working to raise awareness of-and help eliminate-human trafficking in the South Sound. King County has a very effective program, and we look forward to learning from their successes.

Last year I told you about the Mobile Community Intervention Response Team - or MCIRT.

These are mobile teams of mental health and human services professionals who help those struggling with mental illness, drug addiction, and other challenges. They get referrals from first responders and bring help directly to people right where they live.

I'm pleased to report that MCIRT is getting results.

Last year, more than 300 people received better care -avoiding thousands of needless 9-1-1 calls or visits to hospital emergency rooms. In fact, for every dollar spent on MCIRT, \$23 is saved in other costs.

These successful teams have now expanded their services beyond Parkland and Spanaway to include Bonney Lake, Sumner, Graham, South Hill and Puyallup.

We're also moving forward on building a new crisis recovery center in Parkland. This 16-bed facility will provide stabilization, assessments and referrals for those in crisis.

Most clients will stay about 3 days as they regroup and get support for the next phase of their recovery. We will break ground this summer.

One in five people will experience a mental health issue this year - some serious enough to require inpatient care. But we have only 3 inpatient beds for every 100,000 people who live here. That's not nearly enough.

Thankfully, several leaders came forward and brought the community together with a shared vision and a challenge to build the new 120-bed Wellfound Hospital.

Bill Robertson of MultiCare came forward. And Ketul Patel at CHI Franciscan. So did Congressman Derek Kilmer. Campaign co-chairs Brad Cheney and Bill Weyerhaeuser provided strong leadership. And our Council Chair, Doug Richardson, was key to getting it done.

Our residents will have access to this new behavioral health hospital when it opens in Tacoma this month. And it can't happen soon enough!

This summer will also see the opening of a new inpatient facility for pregnant women struggling with addiction.

Thanks to the great work of people like Dr. Abi Plawman, Good Samaritan hospital in Puyallup is launching a program to give women and their babies a fresh start.

The entire East Pierce County community came together to fund raise and take the new facility - one of the very few of its kind - from a dream to a reality.

Congratulations, Dr. Plawman, and thank you!

That's the power of partnerships. They can transform a life. And they can offer hope for those tempted to give up.

I was shocked to learn that 30% of veterans have thought about killing themselves.

Thirty percent.

Sadly, we lose a veteran by their own hand every hour, of every day. Every-Single-Day.

That's why I'm thankful we are partnering with the Cohen Veterans Network to bring a new mental health clinic for post-9/11 veterans and their families to Pierce County.

At this clinic, veterans struggling with PTSD can get help-regardless of insurance or ability to pay. If a veteran is in crisis, they can get treatment that same day.

The Cohen Veterans Network is a national non-profit leader with extensive experience.

Here with us today is Chief Executive Officer Shekh Ali and Vice President of Clinics, Lynn Allar. Thank you for all you're doing for our veterans. I look forward to the grand opening in Lakewood this Friday!

And it's not just veterans who need access to better behavioral health services.

A few weeks ago, I participated in the annual Point-In-Time count of people experiencing homelessness. This year I chose the overnight shift to see the situations you can really only see at 2 in the morning.

Led by Orlando Stumvoll from Comprehensive Life Resources, our team visited several encampments deep in the woods. I was struck by the squalor, garbage, and unsafe conditions in these camps.

I interviewed 12 people that night. All had experienced trauma. And it was obvious that many were suffering from the grip of addiction.

Fortunately, we are making some progress.

During this year's Point in Time count, volunteers identified nearly 1,500 people experiencing homelessness. While it's still far too many, this is down 9% from last year. And more encouragingly, the number of unsheltered people is down by 16%.

We had a record number of volunteers help with the count. And we distributed a record number of donated items-coats, blankets and food.

This impressive community response is due, in large part, to the strong leadership of Valeri Knight in our Human Services Department. Thank you, Valeri, for all of your hard work managing this year's count!

And our community is leading in other ways as well.

When overdoses spiked in Orting, Pastor Dennis Paschke stepped in and stepped up.

A former corporate executive and self-admitted alcoholic, he started the effort to bring a Recovery Café to his community. He knew that recovery was possible and wanted to offer that hope to others.

Partners like Molina Healthcare, the Korum for Kids Foundation, the Tulalip Tribe, the Methodist Church, as well as the City of Orting and Pierce County celebrated when the Café opened its doors in November.

Thank you, Dennis, for your commitment and compassion for folks in need. We're proud to have been a partner with you in this effort.

We're also pleased to partner with a dedicated group of community volunteers on another program that will open soon.

Coffee Oasis is part coffee shop, part shelter, and part education and job training program for homeless and at-risk youth. When young people have no place to go, they can go here.

This is a program that's been successful for 20 years in Kitsap County, and now it's coming to the former St. Ann's Orphanage in Tacoma, thanks to an army of

determined moms and former Tacoma Police Detective Terese Carroll.

I'm excited to participate in the grand opening tomorrow and thank all those who came together to create this incredible place for our youth!

We still have a lot of work ahead of us to make sure people can afford a place to live. In the last five years, rents in Pierce County went up 57% but household income only went up by 7%. Our community needs us to make sure they have access to attainable housing and family wage jobs.

Let's start with housing...

I'm honored to collaborate with Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards and Councilmember Connie Ladenburg to help lead the Mayor's Roundtable on Affordable Housing.

Simply put, we need both more housing and more types of housing. So, we are working together on a series of coordinated policies that engage the private sector to help achieve this objective.

These policies might not look exactly the same in every city, but our overall goal is the same.

For our part, Pierce County is exploring targeted fee waivers and density incentives to encourage builders to produce more attainable housing where it makes sense.

We'll also look to improve our policies on accessory dwelling units and other alternative housing.

In addition to more affordable housing, we are working together to create more and better jobs for the people of Pierce County.

It wasn't that long ago we came together to get Pt. Ruston - the largest economic development project in the history of Pierce County - back on track.

Pt. Ruston is a fantastic story of transformation and renewal.

The formerly contaminated site evolved into a vibrant community of residents, as well as a gathering place for diners, shoppers and tourists. I was down at the waterfront the other day and loved seeing the cranes and concrete trucks at work!

A group of us also jumped into action when Seattle passed a \$275 per employee job tax.

Our local leaders sent a strong response. Cities across Pierce County came together and passed a \$275 credit for each family-wage job created. Our message was clear - Pierce County is eager to welcome new businesses and we view them as key partners.

I'd like to acknowledge the Pierce County mayors who joined us today and ask them to stand.

I appreciate working with you on the pressing issues facing all our communities. Thank you for your leadership so our residents can both live and work in Pierce County!

And all this work is paying off.

First, those who know us best are reinvesting. For example, AIM Aerospace in Sumner is investing \$21 million and adding up to 300 new jobs.

Tool Gauge in Tacoma is investing \$22 million and expects to add 100 new jobs.

And Carlson Paving Products in Frederickson is adding 80,000 square feet of new manufacturing and office space, which should bring even more jobs to Pierce County.

Second, new businesses are coming and bringing family-wage jobs with them. When Best Buy moved from King County, they built a 405,000 square foot building in Frederickson, adding 50 full-time jobs.

We're happy to have Tom Fluke from Best Buy with us here today. Tom, thank

you for choosing Pierce County. We know you'll love it here - and tell your friends about us!

Joining Best Buy in Frederickson will be Logistics Property Company, which recently announced plans to build 5 new buildings totaling 2.5 million square feet.

Just last week I was at the Centeris campus in Puyallup welcoming ScaleMatrix CEO Chris Orlando to their new home. ScaleMatrix is a San Diego-based tech company on the leading edge of data storage and high-performance cloud services. They are one of those companies that provide the infrastructure for other tech businesses to thrive.

And when we bolster our emerging tech cluster, we give the graduates of UW Tacoma's new School of Engineering and Technology -and the entrepreneurs connected to the RAIN incubator-the chance to stay right here and grow with the South Sound.

Beyond the significant contribution to our national security, Joint Base Lewis-McChord makes a 9.2-billion-dollar economic impact on our community every year. And, the port of Tacoma also generates billions in economic activity.

But we're not done yet.

Last year, I asked our Planning & Public Works Department to find ways to significantly cut the upfront fees we charge businesses to connect to our sewer system. The goal was to eliminate one of the key barriers to new entrepreneurs investing in Pierce County.

Well, no surprise; they delivered.

Next week we're submitting to the Council a proposed ordinance that does just that.

The Department and our Red Tape Reduction Task Force keep delivering results, too.

We've streamlined our codes and processes to unleash economic activity, without

lowering standards. The Health Department has joined us to create a one-stop shop for permits.

We've enhanced our excellent online permitting system, PALS Plus, so it can be shared with other jurisdictions.

With the help of our Sheriff's Department and Prosecutor's Office, Planning & Public Works has also been busy cleaning up nuisance properties.

Imagine mountains of trash piled up in your neighbor's back yard, while dozens of junk vehicles litter the front yard.

Or a house that's just a burnt-out shell.

That's what we're talking about.

Even one of these properties is too many, if you live next door.

At its core, what we're doing is processing complaints faster, in a more transparent way, and cleaning sites up more quickly.

In 2018, we launched a website that allows residents to report and track complaints.

And, our code enforcement teams resolved 921 violations. At just two blighted sites, they removed over 75 junk vehicles!

We've accomplished a lot but still have more work to do!

Many thanks to Jeff Rowe, Yvonne Reed, Craig Swanson and the rest of our code enforcement team for their incredible work.

We've also been leveraging technology to make county government more transparent and accountable to you.

We launched an online portal to make it easier for people to make public records requests.

We also created an online site so you can access data from across county government in one easy-to-search place. You can see our performance goals and track our progress toward achieving them.

And we added interactive budget displays so you can better understand how we're spending the money you've given us. And, there's more ahead.

In the coming months we are rolling out two new pieces of our "Open Pierce County" initiative.

Soon, you will be able to look into the County's "checkbook" and see specifically where your tax dollars are going.

You will also be able to use our Capital Projects Explorer to see if our construction projects are on schedule and on budget.

Open Pierce County has been a major countywide effort, and I'd like to thank Julie Demuth from our Finance Department for spearheading this work.

I'd also like to extend my sincere thanks to the voters for approving our proposal to move Pierce County to a new two-year budget!

This concept is new to Pierce County, but the state and many other local governments already do this. I am confident it will prove to be more efficient and help us plan more effectively for the future.

Here's the next thing I'd like us to ask the voters to approve in November.

Justice should be blind, but it shouldn't be blinded by partisan politics. Pierce County voters elected a non-partisan prosecutor this past election, and we should keep it that way.

To that end, I am joining with Prosecutor Mary Robnett in asking the Council to forward to the voters a Charter amendment making the Prosecuting Attorney a non-partisan position.

We already have a non-partisan Sheriff, Assessor-Treasurer and Auditor, and it's time to add the Prosecutor to that list.

So, I've outlined what we're doing to make Pierce County a great place to live and work.

Now I'd like to talk about what we're doing to make our county a great place to raise a family.

In May we celebrated the Foothills Trail Extension that adds 6.2 miles between Buckley and South Prairie and connects twenty miles of beautiful trail that takes cyclists, runners and walkers past farms, rivers, and open space with a background of our magnificent Mt. Rainier.

And now we're partnering with King County to extend the Foothills Trail to the White River.

Next month, ice bumper cars are coming to Sprinker! I can think of a few folks I'd love to challenge to a good, old-fashioned bumper car duel!

And, if we're talking about great places to play, the crown jewel in our collection is Chambers Bay Regional Park. There is simply no other place like it and we are working diligently to be good stewards of the popular park.

After a series of protracted negotiations with a local development team, last December we submitted to the Council a ground lease agreement to create a resort and enhance the park's trail system.

If approved by the Council, the lease would add amenities to the park and reduce the financial burden on sewer ratepayers and the taxpayers of the County. We look forward to the Council's vote in May and hope to move forward.

We are committed to caring for the amazing spaces we have in Pierce County and preserving our natural surroundings for future generations.

In last year's State of the County, I said we would evaluate the potential to convert our ferries to electric power. Our research tells us we can convert our

ferries from diesel to hybrid electric power. However, it can't happen overnight, and we hope to partner with the state to bring it about.

In the meantime, though, we can achieve a 16% reduction in our carbon emissions by fueling our ferries with biodiesel. We plan to move on this in the months ahead.

We also intend to make improvements at our wastewater treatment plant.

The plant's processes generate a gas byproduct valued at almost \$1800 per day. However, most of this biogas is burned for no reason other than to get rid of it.

At the same time, we buy gas to power the treatment plant. So, we have the potential to both save money and reduce emissions if we can capture and use the gas we burn.

By the end of this year, we project to use 63% of the biogas we produce, dramatically reducing the amount we burn.

We're also looking to make major progress on removing fish barriers.

As Billy Frank, Jr. once said, "As the salmon disappear, so do tribal cultures and treaty rights.

We are at a crossroads, and we are running out of time."

Our endangered orcas are losing an important source of food. Sport fishers also suffer as our rivers and streams - once so full of life - become less so with each passing day.

We have a County-Tribal Partner working group with the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, the Muckleshoot, Nisqually and Squaxin Island Tribes. We are actively seeking funds to open over 13 miles of fish habitat for Coho salmon, steelhead, trout and more.

It was an honor to support the Puyallup Tribe of Indians this past summer as they hosted the annual canoe journey. Tribes, nations and canoe families from Canada

to California participated with more than 100 canoes landing in Commencement Bay.

It was powerful to see the richness of tribal culture and traditions through songs and dances, the respect for the Elders, the inclusion of children and youth, and the deep cross-cultural connections felt and shared by so many.

Indian Tribes have my highest respect as sovereign governments. We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively, government to government, on key projects of interest and impact to the tribes, their lands, their rivers and their people.

And that's the way our residents expect us to work - across aisles, across rivers, across cities and towns, and across cultures.

I've started using a term I've heard others use - the Pierce County Way. So, what is it?

The Pierce County Way is our attitude. It's clear vision, strong partnerships, and finding a way to get to "yes."

Taking care of each other and saving lives in the snow - that's the Pierce County Way.

Coming together in a public-private partnership to provide quality behavioral healthcare for our residents - that's the Pierce County Way.

Mayors from throughout the County linking arms and challenging the notion that the Pacific Northwest doesn't need any more jobs - that's the Pierce County Way.

Collaborating to improve services and ending family violence in our community - that's the Pierce County Way.

When we work in the Pierce County Way we bring our collective best to the challenges ahead of us. And, as a group, we find common ground, seek agreement and chart a course forward that works for everyone.

With your partnership, we will continue forward in The Pierce County Way, as we work toward our vision of a vibrant place where people choose to live, work, and raise a family.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

May God bless us in the work ahead.