Race and Social Justice Initiatives in the 2027-2028 Proposed Budget

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of significant changes in the City's 2027-2028 Proposed Budget that advance the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI). The City implements numerous initiatives within department base funding that are not included below in this summary of changes to the budget. Despite the significant deficit in the City's budget for the biennium, this budget preserves many initiatives that advance RSJ while also expanding or adding new programs within the context of available resources.

City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative

There is significant evidence that the opportunities a Seattle resident can access, and the quality of life they experience, are both directly related to their race and where they live. People of color and other under-represented groups in the City of Seattle's workforce face similar issues. To address racial inequities, in 2004 Seattle became the first city in the U.S. to establish a program, the Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI), to explicitly eliminate institutional racism. Institutional racism exists when an organization's programs, policies, and spending work to the benefit of white people and to the detriment of people of color, usually unintentionally.

The Office for Civil Rights leads the RSJI in the City and provides support for departments and staff. As part of RSJI, the City uses a Racial Equity Toolkit to guide policy, program, and budget decision-making toward options that actively support positive racial equity outcomes. The City also uses a racial equity lens to develop a workforce that is inclusive of people of color and other marginalized or under-represented groups at all levels of City employment.

Additionally, most City departments have a "Change Team" to support internal transformation. The team – consisting of a group of employees who champion RSJI activities and strengthen a department's capacity to get more employees involved – facilitates and participates in discussions on race, racism, and strategies to overcome institutional barriers to racial and social equity.

Human Services Department

Add Ongoing Funding for New Shelter Capacity and Associated Services

Expenditures	$18,310,254

This item adds $18.3 million to HSD for the ongoing operations for new and expanded shelter programs for Mayor Wilson's Shelter Accelerator Initiative as outlined in Executive Order 2026-02. This amount includes the funding needed to sustain shelter space opened with one-time money identified in 2026 and additional shelter anticipated to open in 2027.

Seattle is in the midst of a major homelessness crisis. The 2026 Point-in-Time Count found 18,365 individuals experiencing homelessness countywide on a single night; an increase of 9% from 2024 and 72% from 2016. Furthermore, there are estimated to be 1.9 individuals experiencing homelessness per shelter bed in Seattle. There is an urgent need for more beds to reduce this level of homelessness and support pathways indoors for individuals. This item furthers this goal by providing ongoing funding to expand the shelter space and services available in Seattle.

Add Ongoing Funding for Food Banks and Meal Programs

Expenditures	$4,000,000

This item adds $4 million ongoing funding for food banks and meal programs and continues the one-time appropriation made for these purposes in the 2026 Adopted Budget. The funding will support food purchase, staffing, donated food procurement, other program operations, and mobile food pantries and home delivery which provide nutritious groceries to families, teens, homebound residents, and other food insecure communities needing food. This brings the City’s total investment in food banks and meal programs to $9.9 million in 2027.

Increase for Queer and Trans Stabilization Fund

Expenditures	$500,000

This item provides ongoing $500,000 General Fund for a Queer and Trans Stabilization Fund. In 2026, HSD participated in a Trans & Queer Stabilization Interdepartmental Team (IDT). The IDT was tasked with developing budget and policy recommendations to increase the City's support for displaced Trans and Queer Individuals migrating to the City of Seattle. The IDT sought to identify rapid response funding, support for community serving organizations, and long-term stabilization efforts. In addition to rapid response funds identified in 2026, the Mayor’s proposed budget includes $500,000 to support organizations that help meet the emergent needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ community members.

Increase Staffing for Enhanced Coordination of Violence Prevention Services

Expenditures	$0
Position Allocation	2.0

This item adds two positions to HSD to enhance youth violence prevention supportive services and school safety services. These positions will focus on network coordination and data analysis. Together, these roles will strengthen a coordinated, well-supported provider network and build shared data practices that improve service quality, consistency, and impact across the community safety ecosystem. They help ensure providers have the tools, training, and information needed to deliver effective prevention services and support more aligned, data-informed collaboration with City and system partners within the broader violence reduction continuum of services.

Seattle Parks and Recreation

Sustain Teen Late Night Pilot at High Point Community Center

Expenditures	$0
Position Allocation	0.75

This budget-neutral item increases funding for Teen Late Night programming at community centers by $300,000 of General Fund by repurposing no longer needed funds previously budgeted to address pay disparities. This increase will make ongoing the 2026 pilot Teen Late Night programming at High Point Community Center that was initiated with one-time funds in 2026. Teen Late Night currently occurs at eight sites across the city and this item will support the continuation of programming at that level. This change also makes two part-time positions full-time and increases one half-time position to 0.75 FTE for a total FTE increase of 0.75.

Increase Funding for Recreation Scholarships

Expenditures	$0
Position Allocation	0.00

This ongoing item increases the funding for SPR's Recreation Scholarship program by $400,000, bringing the total budget for these scholarships to $850,000. This net-neutral change supports the increased scholarship funding by repurposing Seattle Park District funding budgeted in the Cycle 2 spending plan to support operating costs for newly community centers once renovations were complete. Based on current project timelines for the 8th & Mercer and Lake City community center projects, these operating costs are not likely to be incurred in 2027 or 2028. These scholarships enable access to SPR's recreational programming, such as community center classes like dance and art classes, sports classes, and youth athletics. Scholarship eligibility is based on income and family size, and is available to anyone who qualifies, including seniors and people with disabilities. In recent years, the scholarship budget has had greater demand than ability to support. Many SPR recreational programs have fees associated with participation, making these scholarships an important strategy for improving access to these opportunities for low-income residents.

Reallocate Park District to Invest in Rainier Beach Youth

Expenditures	$0
Position Allocation	1.00

This net-neutral item repurposes $600,000 of existing Seattle Park District appropriations originally planned for the Youth Opportunity Fund toward targeted investments to support youth in Rainier Beach and south Seattle. This investment is intended to improve outcomes for the program and better serve Seattle youth based on community and youth feedback. This will enable a 2 days-per-week Community Learning Center (CLC) after school program pilot at Rainier Beach High School, expanded peer mentorships at Rainier Beach Community Center, increased funding for contracts with community-based organizations offering teen services, and funding for staff development to ensure adults supporting teens are well-trained and supported. This item also adds one new fulltime Recreation Program Coordinator for program and operational management of CLC expansion and reclassifies a current Volunteer Coordinator to a Senior Recreation Specialist to support mentorship programming and operations in high needs community centers and teen life centers.

Office of Labor Standards

Additional Resources to Enforce App-Based Worker Minimum Payment and App-Based Worker Deactivation Rights Ordinances

Expenditures	$356,202
Position Allocation	0.0

The 2027-2028 Proposed Budget includes additional Network Company License (NCL) fee-backed expenditures to continue expanding the implementation and enforcement of two app-based worker labor standards. $336,202 funds two previously legislated Civil Right Analyst positions that will respond to increased intake concerning the relevant labor standards and support the full enforcement authority if the App-Based Worker Deactivation Rights Ordinance, which begins in July 2027. $20,000 funds data analysis functions needed to build out systems for ongoing data collection, analysis, and reporting required by the NCL funded labor standards. In total, the proposed budget appropriates $2.1 million of NCL-fee backed expenditures to OLS to implement these two labor standards, continuing to ramp up activity in this area since the NCL fee became effective in January 2025.

The City established these app-based worker labor standards to change the underlying systems creating race based disparities in our community by strengthening job security, increasing income, and improving other terms and conditions of work. Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color face unique barriers to economic insecurity and disproportionately work in low-wage jobs with insecure working conditions. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data shows that Black and Latinx workers are overrepresented among app-based workers, comprising almost 42 percent of app-based workers but less than 29 percent of the overall labor force.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Community Assisted Response and Engagement

$1.2 million to support the Mayor's Gun Violence Plan (MGVP)

Expenditures	$1,200,000
Position Allocation	2.00

This item transfers $1.2 million in 2027 and $1.1 million in 2028 from the Human Services Department and adds 1.0 FTE Gun Violence Plan Coordinator and 1 FTE Senior Grants positions to support the development of a new Mayor's Gun Violence Plan (MGVP). This investment will support immediate actions to address gun violence that expands on and complements the City's current investments in violence prevention and intervention. CARE will be the leading department in partnership with other key stakeholders such as the Mayor's Office, SPD, King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, HSD and others.

Increase Ongoing funding in Co-LEAD Contract

Expenditures	$1,585,632
Position Allocation	0.00

This item adds $1.6 million in ongoing funding to support and lease housing sites, which provides dedicated housing capacity for the City's Co-Lead program. All 60 available units at the building are currently dedicated to Co-LEAD participants, specialized population with behavioral health and substance abuse issues.

The ongoing funding will maintain this dedicated housing capacity and support continuity of services for individuals identified through the City's prioritized Co-LEAD program. This investment preserves a key component of the City's alternative response and public safety continuum.

Utilities and Transportation

Office of Sustainability and Environment

Add Ongoing Funding for Fresh Bucks Increased Service Levels

Expenditures	$6,275,495
Position Allocation	0.00

This item increases General Fund appropriation authority to maintain higher Fresh Bucks service levels that were funded on a one-time basis in 2026. This increased funding allows Fresh Bucks to continue supporting a monthly benefit level of $60 (an increase from $40 prior to 2026) and to maintain higher enrollments of 8,000 households or more. This action also provides ongoing funding for OSE to hire a permanent Customer Service Representative to provide customer support. OSE will use an existing vacant position to fill this role.

Fresh Bucks is a healthy food program that helps Seattle residents afford fruits and vegetables. The program provides income-eligible enrolled households with monthly vouchers to buy fruits and vegetables at more than 57 participating retailers. Currently, Fresh Bucks has nearly 20,000 households enrolled and receiving benefits with a total budget of $11,000,000.

Add FEPP Levy Funding for Universal School Meals at Seattle Public Schools

Expenditures	$4,140,000
Position Allocation	0.00

This item provides funding from the 2025 Families, Education, Preschool, and Promise (FEPP) Levy for the OSE to administer contracts with Seattle Public Schools for universal school meals. This action splits funding across two years and includes an additional $2.1 million in 2028. This action supports the Mayor's plan to fund early implementation of universal school meals at Seattle Public Schools, in advance of anticipated state funding. An additional $3.6 million was provided to OSE in the 2026 Midyear Supplemental Budget for the 2026-27 school year.