

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

WELCOMING WORKPLACE | 2025 ANNUAL REPORT



BUILDING COMMUNITIES THAT FEEL SAFE, WELCOMING, AND CONNECTED

Pierce County is committed to building and supporting a representative workforce and workplaces that are safe, welcoming, and connected. This year's Welcoming Workplace annual report is a continuation of our work to acknowledge our employees' and community's uniqueness, and it sets Pierce County on a bold new path towards creating more spaces where all are invited to share their voice and experiences. When we move Forward Together, everyone is included.

In this report, you'll find a letter from County Executive Ryan Mello detailing this mission, an update on key performance indicators, descriptions of new and ongoing initiatives, and interviews with members of our county staff. We are proud of these efforts and pleased to share them with you.

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DEAR COLLEAGUES, PARTNERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS,

Pierce County's unique character is a reflection of the urban, suburban, and rural communities we call home and the incredible range of our residents' lived experience. About 53 percent of our residents live in cities, and towns, and 47 percent in unincorporated areas. Nearly 17 percent of our residents speak a language other than English and about 40 percent identify as a person of color. About 13 percent of individuals in Pierce County report having a disability. Nearly 12 percent are veterans. Our median age is about 37, and almost 40 percent of residents rent their home.

It's increasingly important that we communicate clearly about our efforts to support a representative workforce and to create workplaces that are welcoming to everyone. We convened a broad, multidisciplinary group of County employees to discuss how to update the DEI framework originally passed by the County Council in 2021. That effort resulted in the "Welcoming Workplace Initiative," which aims to recruit and retain highly qualified employees; create a culture where all employees feel supported to do their best work and are proud to work for the County; and ensure all residents have meaningful access to information and opportunities to participate in services and programs. As we begin this new chapter, I am thrilled to present the 2025 Welcoming Workplace Annual Report.

Over the past year, we have worked diligently to ensure that Pierce County's workforce is representative of our community, and that our services are accessible for employees and residents as the needs of our community grow. Thanks to the tireless efforts of employees and our community partners throughout the county, we are centering the voices of those we serve to make progress on the core pillars of our "forward together" strategic plan: communities that are safe for all; effective, welcoming, and responsive services; and an economy that works for everyone.

One key step includes a new County policy allowing employees to spend up to one hour of County time per

month participating in Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), affirming our belief that fairness and belonging are vital to both workplace culture and public service. For the first time in county history, we hosted flag raisings for LGBTQ+ Pride Month and Juneteenth, signifying our commitment to celebrating our community. We also honored Native American and Alaska Native Heritage Month with a historic first by displaying Tribal flags from the Nisqually, Puyallup, Muckleshoot, and Squaxin Island Tribes in our Council Chambers. We created a Juvenile Justice Task Force to tackle the challenges of youth rehabilitation and create pathways for youth to thrive, and also launched two directives focused on reducing barriers in hiring and emphasizing clear, timely communication to serve the needs of Pierce County residents.

These are just a few examples of how we are creating a better Pierce County for all who visit, live in, work in, and enjoy our region. I am proud of everything we have accomplished together in my first year as County Executive, and I can't thank you enough for your support as we continue to build communities that feel safe, welcoming, and connected.



With appreciation,

Ryan N. Mello
Pierce County Executive, He/Him

STRIVING TOWARDS OUR GOALS



In support of Pierce County's dedication to transparency and excellence, we track key metrics to measure our progress, communicate results, and identify areas where we can improve. Here's a snapshot of our current workforce data:

EMPLOYEE OVERVIEW

Race/Ethnicity

27%

MINORITY EMPLOYEES

Compared to Pierce County demographic data of 28.9%

Gender

50%

FEMALE EMPLOYEES

Compared to Pierce County demographic data of 50%

Military Status

10.2%

VETERAN EMPLOYEES

Compared to Pierce County demographic data of 10.8%

2025 CORE PILLARS



THANKS TO THE TIRELESS EFFORTS OF EMPLOYEES AND OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY, WE ARE **CENTERING THE VOICES OF THOSE WE SERVE** TO MAKE PROGRESS ON THE CORE PILLARS OF OUR “FORWARD TOGETHER” STRATEGIC PLAN: **COMMUNITIES THAT ARE SAFE FOR ALL; EFFECTIVE, WELCOMING, AND RESPONSIVE SERVICES; AND AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE.** ”

—Executive Ryan Mello



COMMUNITIES
THAT ARE SAFE
FOR ALL

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EFFECTIVE,
WELCOMING,
AND RESPONSIVE
SERVICES

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THAT WORKS
FOR EVERYONE

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COMMISSION ON REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS

THE COMMISSION ON REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS (CRIA) ADVISES PIERCE COUNTY LEADERSHIP ON **KEY ISSUES IMPACTING IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES**, RANGING FROM PUBLIC SAFETY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TO LANGUAGE ACCESS AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY.



ALICE FONG

Commission Chair, She/Her

COMMISSION ON REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS

For Alice Fong, creating a community where everyone feels safe isn't abstract policy work—it's deeply personal. Born to Chinese immigrant parents and raised in Tacoma, Alice grew up watching her father navigate a world that didn't always welcome him. Teachers avoided him in the hallway. English wasn't his first language. Bias and misunderstanding shaped far too many moments.

Those early memories lit a lifelong fire in Alice:
We can do so much better for each other.

As Chair of the Commission on Refugee and Immigrant Affairs, she leads with that conviction. "It's part of our human condition to become closer to each other," she says. "When that connection is missing, it hurts us all." Her work centers on repairing that loss through relationship-building, truth-telling, and creating space for all Pierce County communities to be seen in their full humanity.

The commission's approach is intentional, relational, and rooted in trust. Commissioners spend time in the community at cultural events, summits, and potlucks as a

first step towards initiating real conversations in the places where people feel safe enough to share what's underneath the surface.

"People won't tell you their struggles until you've built a deeper relationship," Alice explains. "And we can't create effective policy without understanding those very real experiences."

Her leadership is also shaping the commission itself. Alice has been holding the line to ensure members include immigrants and first-generation descendants who can speak to lived experience authentically. It's this care that builds credibility with communities who have been historically marginalized, harmed, or unheard.

Looking ahead, Alice sees the commission's role as both bridge and catalyst. "Our mission is hand-in-hand with the county's vision," she says. "A place where people know each other, protect each other, and keep each other safe. That's what makes a home."



FLAG RAISINGS

“FOR THE FIRST TIME IN COUNTY HISTORY, WE HOSTED FLAG RAISINGS FOR LGBTQ+ PRIDE MONTH AND JUNETEENTH, SIGNIFYING OUR COMMITMENT TO CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY. WE ALSO HONORED NATIVE AMERICAN AND ALASKA NATIVE HERITAGE MONTH WITH A HISTORIC FIRST BY DISPLAYING TRIBAL FLAGS FROM THE NISQUALLY, PUYALLUP, MUCKLESHOOT, AND SQUAXIN ISLAND TRIBES IN OUR COUNCIL CHAMBERS.”

—Executive Ryan Mello



TROY SERAD

Transportation Engineer, He/Him

PLANNING AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

As co-chair of the LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group (ERG), Troy Serad is proud to be part of something that didn't exist at the county just a few years ago. So when the Pride and Juneteenth flags were raised above the County-City building in 2025, and Tribal flags were raised in Council Chambers, it marked a historic first and a deeply personal milestone for many. For Troy, a transportation engineer by day and community-builder by night, it was a moment of affirmation, recognition, and community.

“Standing there, watching the flag rise over a government building...it was emotional in a way I didn't expect,” he recalled. “For a community that has had a strained relationship with government, it felt like acknowledgment. The government body that helps shape our daily lives was saying, “We see you. You belong here.”

The LGBTQ+ ERG is one of several newly formed groups across Pierce County building connection, visibility, and belonging. Troy finds this work deeply meaningful.

Alongside other group members, he helps guide culturally-responsive policies and creates space for staff to feel seen and supported, especially those working in smaller departments.

Planning the Pride flag raising was a collaborative celebration that brought together trusted voices from across the county, including youth leaders, regional leaders, advocates, and county staff. “Pierce County took a bold step. The flag is just the beginning.”

For Troy, safety is defined as the presence of support. “We can't guarantee safety,” he said, “but we can build systems of care and graciousness. We can create a community and a workplace where people aren't afraid to be themselves.”

A County moving forward openly, proudly, and together. It's a small step with a big implication.



JUVENILE JUSTICE TASK FORCE

EXECUTIVE RYAN MELLO CONVENED THE JUVENILE JUSTICE TASK FORCE TO GUIDE A **ONCE-IN-A-GENERATION OPPORTUNITY**: REPLACING PIERCE COUNTY'S PRIMARY JUVENILE COURT, REMANN HALL, WITH A NEW FACILITY CENTERED ON PRIORITIZING HEALING FOR YOUTH, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITY.



HONORABLE JOSEPH A. EVANS

Judge, He/Him

PIERCE COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

Judge Evans believes young people deserve a second chance and a safe place to take it. As a former public defender and now a Superior Court Judge, he's spent years navigating the complexities of juvenile justice.

Built in the 1970s, Remann Hall is showing its age. Infrastructure issues have forced temporary closures and even required housing some youth in adult jails—an outcome no one wants. So when the doors of Pierce County's juvenile detention center began to break down—literally—it became clear that fixing the facility would take more than quick repairs. It would take vision. And it would take all of us.

“We're not just talking about a new building,” says Judge Evans. “We're talking about how our community wants to show up for its youth. What kind of support do we want to offer? What kind of future do we believe they deserve?”

“About 75–80 percent of the young people we see are in deep crisis, being removed from home, facing trauma, and struggling to trust anyone. They need more than detention.

They need care. They need counseling. They need hope,” says Judge Evans.

Pierce County is already recognized as a national leader in reducing youth recidivism and implementing evidence-based therapies such as Functional Family Therapy. But to continue that progress, the physical environment needs to reflect the county's commitment to healing, not just holding.

The Juvenile Justice Task Force, established by Executive Ryan Mello, is bringing together an unprecedented coalition, including judges, public defenders, prosecutors, educators, law enforcement, parents of formerly incarcerated youth, and even the youth themselves, to reimagine what a secure, restorative, community-rooted juvenile facility can and should be.

The task force is developing a plan to present to Executive Ryan Mello and the County Council for next steps. Their work is community-informed at every turn and committed to investing in the future of our youth.



LANGUAGE ACCESS

INFORMATION BELONGS TO EVERYONE. A WELCOMING GOVERNMENT MEETS PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE, AND THAT INCLUDES THE LANGUAGE THEY SPEAK. THAT'S WHY EXECUTIVE RYAN MELLO LAUNCHED THE INFORMATION FOR ALL (IFA) INITIATIVE, A NEW EFFORT TO MAKE PIERCE COUNTY SERVICES ACCESSIBLE TO EVERY RESIDENT, REGARDLESS OF LANGUAGE OR LITERACY LEVEL.



JEMI KIM

Language Access and Equity Coordinator, She/Her

PLANNING AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

“Accessing government services in your preferred language is a basic human right we all deserve,” says Jemi Kim.

For Jemi, language access is personal. A Korean speaker comfortable speaking four languages, she grew up watching her immigrant parents navigate systems that weren’t built for them. Today, as Pierce County’s Language Access and Equity Coordinator, she’s ensuring others don’t have to experience the same challenges.

“One language isn’t better than another,” she says. “Language is tied to culture and identity... and when we design programs around language access and justice, we’re showing every person that their identity and voice matters.”

That belief is now at the heart of Executive Ryan Mello’s Information for All initiative, the county-wide commitment

to creating communication that’s clear, representative, and human. From plain-language policies to interpreter access and handheld AI-powered language assistant devices, the goal is to make services understandable and accessible to everyone, regardless of their language or literacy level.

“We’re not just helping people hear from us,” Jemi explains. “We’re creating ways to hear from them. That’s what a welcoming and responsive government looks like.”

Through training, community-led development, and a focus on empathy, IFA is equipping staff with the tools and cultural understanding to serve residents better. It’s already changing the way departments interact with the public, and it’s helping rebuild trust in communities where language has historically been a barrier to belonging.



PRACTICING ANTI-RACISM EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP

PIERCE COUNTY'S EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERGS) ARE EMPLOYEE-LED, COUNTY-SUPPORTED SPACES WHERE STAFF WITH SHARED EXPERIENCES OR INTERESTS COME TOGETHER TO **SUPPORT EACH OTHER AND ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE**. THE COUNTY IS PROUD TO SUPPORT SEVERAL ACTIVE ERGS, INCLUDING:

African American | Black ERG
JUNTOS (Latinx and allies)

LGBTQ+ ERG
Veterans ERG

Bicyclist Community Group
Practicing Anti-Racism ERG



BRITTANY SQUIER

Management Analyst, She/Her

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

When Brittany joined Pierce County’s Practicing Anti-Racism Employee Resource Group, she wasn’t looking to lead. She was looking to learn.

“I wanted to be part of making Pierce County a better place to work for everyone,” she shares. “I have privilege, and I believe it’s my responsibility to use that privilege to make things more fair, more just.”

Today, Brittany co-chairs the ERG, which provides a brave space for county employees to explore issues of race and belonging regardless of where they’re starting. “This group is for anyone who cares about equitable access to opportunity,” she says. “You don’t have to have all the answers. You just have to care.”

Throughout the year, the group has hosted meaningful conversations and events that encourage reflection and action. From co-hosting a Belonging Lunch and Learn with JUNTOS and the African American | Black ERG to organizing a free museum night for county employees, the focus has been to show up, listen deeply, and apply what was learned to make improvements.

“It’s about the individual stories...the coworker who finally feels seen, the person who shares something personal in a meeting and feels heard. That’s how we know this work matters.”

Most ERG members volunteer their time outside of their day jobs, fueled by a shared hope to build a workplace rooted in care and accountability. As the group looks to the future, they’re developing new ways to share what they’ve learned more broadly, starting with a communications plan to engage more county employees, and eventually, the community.

“Anti-racism is an active process and it’s a skill. One that makes us better coworkers, better neighbors, and better public servants.”

In support of a welcoming culture, Executive-branch departments now formally allow Pierce County employees to spend up to one hour of County time per month attending ERG meetings and events. This policy reinforces the County’s commitment to ensuring employees have space and support to connect, learn, and grow together.



STIPENDS FOR MEMBERS OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

TO MAKE SERVICE ON COUNTY BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS GENUINELY OPEN TO ALL, THE COUNTY PASSED ORDINANCE 2025-513 TO LAUNCH A **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAM**, OFFERING STIPENDS TO INCOME-QUALIFIED MEMBERS SO PRACTICAL BARRIERS LIKE WAGES OR CHILDCARE DON'T STAND IN THE WAY OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION.



STEFANIE LOVE

Human Services Coordinator, She/Her

HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

“I’ve had the privilege of supporting both the Commission on Refugee and Immigrant Affairs and the Accessible Communities Advisory Committee,” Stefanie shares. “And I’ve seen firsthand how much wisdom, insight, and lived experience community members bring to these spaces. But for too long, serving has required something not everyone can afford: unpaid time.”

That’s why the county’s new stipend policy is such a milestone. After years of statewide and local advocacy, the county adopted a policy in 2025 that offers financial compensation to eligible members of boards and commissions. The goal: To ensure people from all socioeconomic backgrounds—not just those who can afford to volunteer—have the opportunity to participate in civic life.

Now, income-qualified members can receive \$50 per day for attending meetings or doing related work. Youth under 24, often juggling school and part-time jobs, can earn \$100 per day for their time and contributions. “This policy invites key new voices, especially representing youth,” Stefanie explains, “and makes sure they’re supported.”

A 2022 county study confirmed the gap. Although boards and commissions included a broad swath of identities and lived experiences, the study showed a lack of representation from lower-income households and young people. “We serve people every day through our programs,” Stefanie says, “so it’s only right that they have a say in shaping them.”

For communities with disabilities, the policy opens doors that once felt closed. One advisory committee member noted how it could empower those on fixed incomes or living with disabilities to finally participate without financial strain.

“Increasing civic engagement creates an economy that truly works for everyone,” Stefanie says. “It’s about access, opportunity, and inclusion not just in services, but in the decisions behind them.”

Looking ahead, the county will seek budget support to sustain the program long-term.



REDUCING BARRIERS TO HIRING

TO BUILD A WORKFORCE THAT **REFLECTS THE COMMUNITY** IT SERVES, PIERCE COUNTY IS RETHINKING THE WAY IT HIRES. NEW EFFORTS FOCUS ON REMOVING OUTDATED DEGREE REQUIREMENTS, MODERNIZING BACKGROUND CHECK POLICIES, AND ENSURING FAIR, COMPETITIVE HIRING PRACTICES.



ROBIN VAZQUEZ

Director, She/Her

HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

When Robin Vazquez stepped into her role as Director of Human Resources in early 2025, she inherited a team already rethinking what it means to build a fair and accessible hiring system.

Now she's leading the charge.

"We've relied too heavily on things like four-year degrees or ten years of experience to determine whether someone is qualified," Robin explains. "But those don't always tell us if someone can do the work well. We're shifting to a competency-based approach that values skill, potential, and lived experience...whether that comes from military service, volunteer roles, or simply doing the hard work in nontraditional paths."

Robin acknowledges that the shift had already begun prior to her coming aboard. The County is continuing to review all job classifications to ensure minimum qualifications are actually relevant to the work of the position. It's reducing reliance on degree requirements where they're not legally necessary and removing its use of E-Verify, a federal system that can incorrectly flag candidates based on document mismatches. The County also plans to standardize background check procedures to avoid screening out strong applicants for issues that are outdated or irrelevant to the role.

"We had an applicant who was disqualified based on something in his record from over a decade ago," Robin says. "It had no bearing on the job he was applying for...that kind of experience doesn't reflect our values, and it's why we're doing this work."

Because of this, Robin and her team are reimagining the full candidate experience, from how job postings are written to how feedback is shared with finalists. "We want people to feel like they are respected throughout the process, whether or not they get the job."

These efforts are particularly meaningful for communities who've historically been underrepresented in public employment—people who may not apply unless they meet every single listed qualification.

"We know this will be a cultural shift. It takes more effort, but if we want the right people in the right jobs, this is how we get there," Robin emphasizes.

At its core, this initiative is about aligning policy with purpose. As Robin puts it, "A fair economy means people have a real chance whether they're applying for their first job, shifting careers, or trying something new. Our job is to make sure those doors are truly open."

“ I CAN'T THANK YOU ENOUGH
FOR YOUR SUPPORT AS WE
CONTINUE TO BUILD
COMMUNITIES THAT FEEL
**SAFE, WELCOMING,
AND CONNECTED.** ”

—Executive Ryan Mello

