



Washington State Legislature

March 5, 2026

The Honorable Bob Ferguson
Governor of Washington

The Honorable Nick Brown
Attorney General of Washington

Angela Ramirez
Secretary
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

Tim Lang
Secretary
Washington State Department of Corrections

Sen. Jamie Pedersen
Majority Leader
Washington State Senate

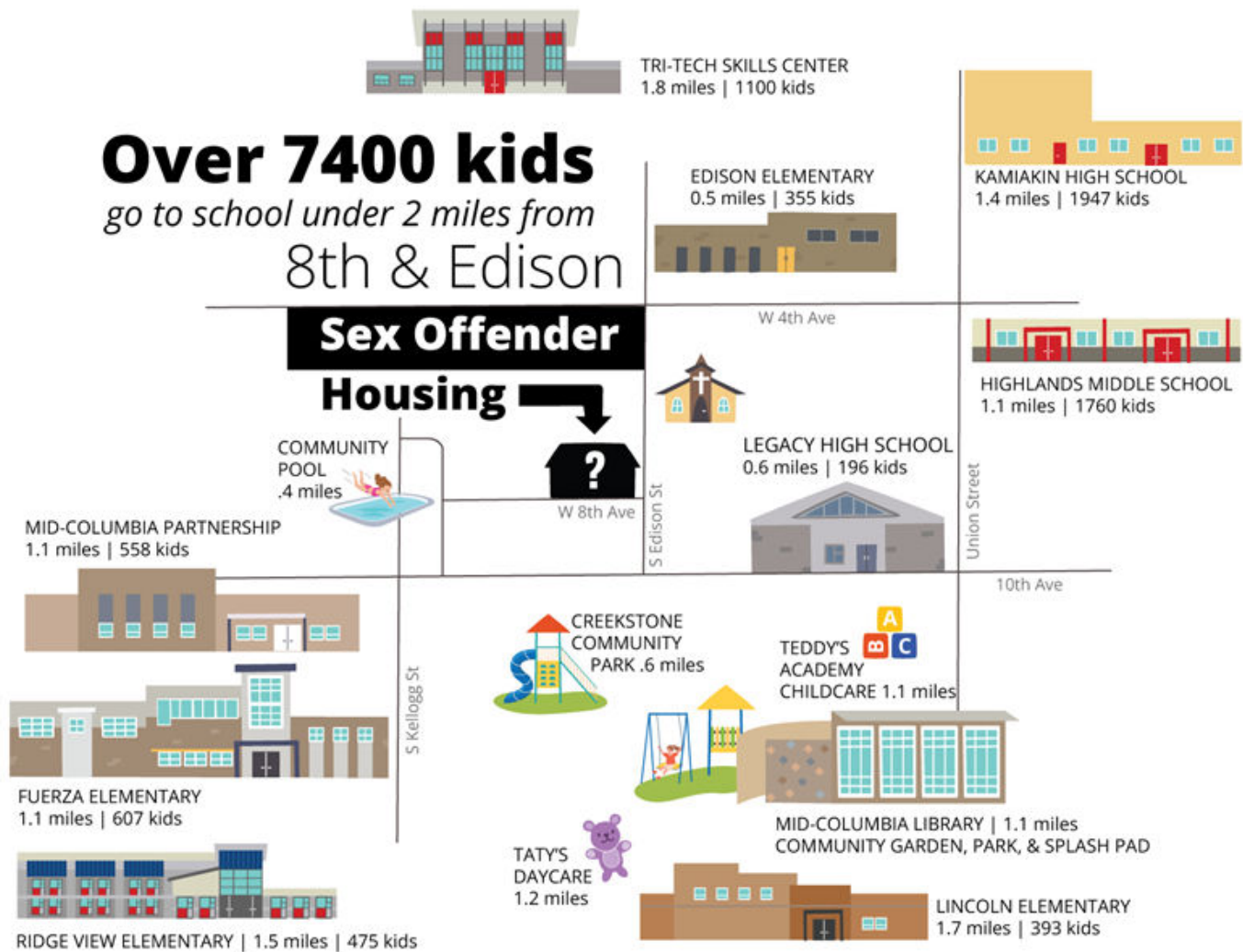
Rep. Laurie Jenkins
Speaker
Washington State House of Representatives

Dear Governor Ferguson, Attorney General Brown, Secretary Ramirez, Secretary Lang, Majority Leader Pedersen and Speaker Jenkins:

We write to express our strong opposition to the proposed siting of a less restrictive alternative (LRA) housing facility for sexually violent predators in a residential neighborhood in Kennewick. The proposed location raises serious public safety concerns, exposes significant gaps in Washington's current placement framework, and has generated widespread alarm across the Tri-Cities community. We urge the state to immediately suspend consideration of this proposal and undertake a comprehensive review of the siting process and governing standards.

The proposed site at 5304 W. 8th Ave. sits in a densely populated residential neighborhood near multiple schools and youth-centered community facilities. Within about 2 miles of the location, more than 7,000 students attend nearby schools, including elementary, middle and high schools located roughly half a mile to one mile from the property. Child care providers, parks and a public library are also located nearby, and a playground sits directly across the street from the property. A community pool where children swim and gather is also located in the neighborhood and is visible from the residence itself.

Map: Proposed LRA Location and Nearby Schools, Parks and Youth Facilities



Placing individuals with histories of extreme sexual violence in the center of a child-centered residential neighborhood raises serious questions about the adequacy of the standards governing LRA siting decisions. Even if technically permissible under current law, the proposed location undermines public confidence in the state's oversight of sexually violent predator placements and highlights the absence of clear, consistent standards guiding these decisions.

Community response to this proposal has been overwhelming. Thousands of residents across the Tri-Cities have expressed concern through public meetings, community organizing and correspondence with state and local officials. At a public meeting at Highlands Middle School alone, more than 300 residents filled the auditorium to capacity to make their voices heard. Parents, students, survivors of sexual violence and local officials described how the placement would affect their families and neighborhoods. Each of us attended that meeting and heard those concerns directly. We also expressed our own concerns to state officials.

Local government leaders have also taken formal action. The Kennewick City Council and the Kennewick School Board jointly adopted a resolution opposing the proposed placement and calling on state leaders to reconsider the policies that allow such facilities to be located in densely populated neighborhoods without meaningful consultation with local governments and school districts.

Regional governments across the Tri-Cities have begun taking extraordinary steps in response to the lack of clear state standards governing these placements. Pasco has approved a temporary moratorium on new sexually

violent predator housing while it studies potential regulatory options. Richland has adopted a six-month moratorium on siting LRA facilities while it reviews its siting and public notification process, and West Richland is considering zoning changes that would restrict where similar facilities could be located.

This situation highlights broader structural problems in Washington's system for managing LRA placements. The current statutory framework grants significant authority to state agencies and courts to site these facilities, but provides few enforceable standards regarding neighborhood density, proximity to schools or child care facilities, or early notification to affected communities. Cities and counties are largely excluded from the siting process even though the direct impact of these decisions falls on local neighborhoods, schools and families.

Washington's civil commitment framework exists because courts have determined that individuals confined after their prison sentences must have a genuine path toward potential community release. Ensuring that path exists, however, does not require placing facilities in residential neighborhoods with large concentrations of children. The current framework lacks safeguards necessary to ensure placements are made responsibly and with appropriate consideration for surrounding communities.

Recent editorial coverage has also underscored the seriousness of the issue. This weekend, the Tri-City Herald warned that continued inaction on reforming Washington's civil commitment placement system risks repeating oversight failures that have drawn public criticism in recent years. Communities should not have to wait for another preventable incident before policymakers examine whether the current system is working as intended.

The current system also creates financial incentives that raise additional public policy concerns. Private parties may purchase residential properties for the purpose of housing individuals approved for LRA placement and receive ongoing state payments through contracts to operate those facilities. While contracting can provide an important mechanism for oversight and supervision, the structure also allows property owners and operators to acquire multiple residences used for LRA placements. This raises broader policy questions about whether existing oversight and accountability mechanisms are sufficient when facilities housing sexually violent predators are placed in residential neighborhoods and supported by ongoing state funding.

Earlier this session, we introduced legislation to strengthen safety buffers around schools and child care facilities, improve transparency in property acquisition for LRA use, ensure local supervision and accountability, and allow county prosecutors to weigh in before courts approve placement sites. One bill received a public hearing in the Senate, but none were heard in the House, leaving residents and law enforcement without an opportunity to place their concerns on the legislative record.

Despite the seriousness of this issue and repeated outreach from legislators and community leaders, meaningful engagement from state leadership has been limited.

Given these circumstances, we respectfully request the following actions.

First, we urge the Department of Social and Health Services to pause further consideration of the proposed Kennewick placement while a comprehensive review of the site and surrounding conditions is conducted.

Second, we ask state agencies to provide full transparency regarding the criteria used to identify and evaluate potential LRA locations, including the safety plans, staffing models and supervision structures proposed for this site.

Third, we urge the governor and relevant state agencies to work with local governments, law enforcement and community leaders to establish clearer siting standards that account for neighborhood density, proximity to schools and child care facilities, and the presence of vulnerable populations.

Finally, if these concerns are not addressed before the end of the legislative session, we call on legislative leadership to ensure these reform proposals receive full consideration and public hearings next legislative session. Communities deserve a transparent process that allows their concerns to be heard before decisions with significant public safety implications are made.

The residents of Kennewick and the broader Tri-Cities region have made their concerns unmistakably clear. They are asking for transparency, accountability and reasonable safeguards that protect children and families while ensuring the state fulfills its legal obligations under civil commitment law.

We urge you to take these concerns seriously, reconsider the proposed Kennewick placement and work with us to ensure Washington's policies governing sexually violent predator placements reflect the highest standards of public safety and community accountability.

Sincerely,



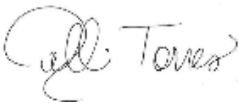
Sen. Matt Boehnke
8th Legislative District



Rep. April Connors
8th Legislative District



Rep. Stephanie Barnard
8th Legislative District



Sen. Nikki Torres
15th Legislative District