



**BUSINESS OF THE CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND**

**AB 6931  
May 19, 2026  
Study Session**

**AGENDA BILL INFORMATION**

<b>TITLE:</b>	AB 6931: YFS Program Update and Youth Matters Report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
<b>RECOMMENDED ACTION:</b>	Receive report. No action necessary.	

<b>DEPARTMENT:</b>	Youth and Family Services
<b>STAFF:</b>	Ali Spietz, Chief of Administration Derek Franklin, YFS Administrator
<b>COUNCIL LIAISON:</b>	n/a
<b>EXHIBITS:</b>	1. PowerPoint Presentation: AB6931X1
<b>CITY COUNCIL PRIORITY:</b>	n/a

<b>AMOUNT OF EXPENDITURE</b>	\$ n/a
<b>AMOUNT BUDGETED</b>	\$ n/a
<b>APPROPRIATION REQUIRED</b>	\$ n/a

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this agenda item is to provide an update on Youth and Family Services programs and present a report that includes behavioral health survey data related to Mercer Island youth.

- The City of Mercer Island Department of Youth and Family Services (YFS) provides an array of behavior health and human services to the residents of Mercer Island. These services include outpatient mental health, school-based mental health, senior support, emergency financial assistance, food security, substance abuse prevention and intervention, parent education, and community health promotion.
- Information included herein is provided to update the City Council on the trends in service demands, YFS’s response, and how current services align with need. Results from the 2025 Washington Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) administered by the Mercer Island School District every two years to students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 will augment the report.
- The Youth Matters group was established by YFS through its Healthy Youth Initiative community prevention and wellness coalition in 2025 to elevate youth voice and gather feedback directly from youth on their behavioral health and wellbeing needs to help inform YFS services.
- Youth leaders from the Youth Matters group will present issues important to youth in the human services/ behavior health domain to make their perspective known to the City Council and to support the YFS goal of elevating youth voice.

- Staff will present a summary of YFS services, the YFS approach to service delivery, and select results from the 2025 Healthy Youth Survey and trend data that highlights key risk and protective factors among community youth (Exhibit 1).

## BACKGROUND

YFS provides updates to the City Council on behavioral health and human service trends, demand, and programming alignment approximately annually for general awareness.

Demands for human services spiked on Mercer Island during the COVID-19 pandemic when YFS experienced a significant increase in requests for housing stability, food security, and mental health supports. The structural and intrapersonal traumas of the pandemic exacerbated established challenges, including the national youth mental health crisis, isolated seniors, and under-resourced residents facing eviction related to financial instability, un/under employment, and/or unexpected medical expenses.

Currently, although some mental health and behavioral impacts from the pandemic remain, especially for youth and seniors, many of the demands on YFS services are returning to pre-pandemic levels. However, support for basic needs, seniors experiencing isolation, and certain mental health conditions among youth such as anxiety disorders remain at elevated levels. Recent results from the Washington Health Youth Survey (HYS) find progress has been made in some key health indicators among Mercer Island youth, while others remain elevated.

The Youth Matters group was established by YFS in 2025 to provide the department direct feedback from Mercer Island youth on emergent issues and topics in the youth culture that overlap with YFS's mission to support the wellbeing of Islanders across the life span. This will be the first opportunity for leaders from the group to report directly to the City Council on emerging behavioral health and human service issues seen from a youth perspective. These issues have and will be documented by YFS and integrated into the Department's work plan where appropriate and addressed through efforts of the YFS Healthy Youth Initiative coalition.

## ISSUE/DISCUSSION

In 2026, YFS continues to experience consistent demand for services across all programs, particularly those that support youth, seniors, and under-resourced households. Staff will provide a snapshot of current behavioral health issues, that highlights the current YFS service portfolio, the framework guiding service delivery, and longitudinal survey results from the past three Healthy Youth Surveys that point out trends in some key risk and protective factor areas regarding youth (Exhibit 1). These include indicators about youth substance use, mental health, and availability of resources. Two Mercer Island High School students from the YFS Youth Matters group will co-present with staff from the same slide deck on their perspective on issues facing Mercer Island youth today and from a student-developed peer survey on indicators related to mental health.

### Youth Programming

Youth mental health and substance use continue to be of concern nationally and on Mercer Island. YFS outpatient mental health services receive a high number of requests to support the mental health of youth experiencing issues with anxiety, depression, family conflict, eating disorders, substance use/abuse, achievement-based stressors, interpersonal or sexual violence, and challenges with marginalization or discrimination based on race, identity, orientation, or achievement. YFS typically runs a wait list for outpatient

counseling services. YFS school counselors see similar demands and since the pandemic are more often tasked with supporting very high-needs students with challenges in multiple domains—developmental, behavioral, emotional, and academic. YFS faces some challenges meeting the needs of Chinese (often Mandarin) speaking households and refers to linguistically aligned counseling services off-Island.

Healthy Youth Survey Data (2025) shows progress in many risk/protective factor domains while also highlighting that work remains to improve youth health and safety. Longitudinal survey data comparisons show relative changes in rates of youth substance use, risk factors related to substance use, mental health issues including depression and suicide ideation, and other health factors such as excessive screen time, lifetime sexual violence, and sleep on a school night.

YFS services that support the needs of youth include low-barrier, school-based mental health counselors in all public schools, sliding fee mental health outpatient counseling for youth and families, parent education with support from a Best Starts For Kids King County grant, and substance use prevention and mental health promotion through efforts of the YFS Healthy Youth Initiative, Parenting Mercer Island Website, Island Space youth mental health campaign, and Youth Matters group. YFS is exploring the possibility of enhanced translation and interpreter services and continues to partner and information-share with the Mercer Island Chinese Association.

### **Senior Programming**

Senior/elderly residents are seeking more mental health counseling with the YFS outpatient services as evidenced by more clients over 70 years of age. YFS continues to receive feedback that Mercer Island seniors experience challenges due to isolation and food and housing insecurity, and lack of emotional support, respite services, and exercise and activity programming.

YFS services that support the needs of seniors include no cost case management services from the YFS Senior Services Specialist, sliding fee outpatient mental health counseling, senior support groups (Living Alone, Death Café, and Caregivers Support Group), and through a collaboration with Mercer Island Parks and Recreation to offer a falls prevention class (SAIL) six times per week at MICEC.

YFS also began an initiative in 2025 to frame the combined department effort focused on seniors, “Seniors Rising,” which is also the name of the monthly senior newsletter now published by YFS and distributed electronically and in print (quarterly). A 2026 grant from the Mercer Island Community Fund and additional contributions from the MIYFS Foundation supported YFS hosting a lunch for seniors in collaboration with MICEC staff to recognize the launch of the May, 2026 print edition of the newsletter and to increase awareness of the Seniors Rising initiative.

### **Emergency and Family Assistance**

Under-resourced Mercer Island households continue to receive support services from the YFS Family Support program. Stressors include general inflation, cost of housing, medical costs, and underemployment that continue to put pressure on the ability of some households to meet basic needs. The 2024 YFS Community Needs Assessment identified that approximately 5% of residents live at or below the poverty threshold. Seniors on fixed incomes, young families, families experiencing homelessness, and families new to the area or country often present to YFS with the highest needs.

YFS services that support the needs of this population include food security efforts via a contract with Hopelink to bring the Mobile Food Market to the MICEC parking lot twice monthly, short term rent and utility

assistance to income qualified residents (below 80% King County Area Median Income), other individualized financial supports for basic needs, and no cost case management and systems navigation services from the YFS Family Support and Senior Support Specialists.

## **RECOMMENDED ACTION**

Receive report. No action necessary.