

Molly McGuire

From: Leslie Somerstein <lesliesomerstein@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, August 30, 2026 9:00 PM
To: Council
Subject: SUPPORT FOR THE JCC

My name is Leslie Somerstein. I currently live in Seattle, but I was raised in Bellevue and on Mercer Island on S.E. 67th Street, where my Nonnie and Bop built their home in 1963.

I was raised by a mother who worked full-time. Her job included long hours and frequent travel. In 1985, at a time when women working full-time was not the norm, she had to rely heavily on the Jewish Community Center.

I started coming to the Jewish Community Center at 6 months old – Infant Day Care - in 1985.

JCC was where I:

- Attended Pre-School
- Learned how to Swim
- Came for After-School Care through Middle School
- Attended Summer Camp
- Starred as the head munchkin in an early 1990's production of the Wizard of Oz
- Played Softball in the Maccabi Games
- Attended B'nai B'rith Youth Organization through High School.
- Attended Hebrew High School

If I was not with my family, at school, or playing sports, I was at the J.

Today, at 41 years old, I write to you as a member of the JCC Board of Directors for the JCC that 41 years later looks the same as the halls I ran as a child.

I also write to you as a practicing attorney for the last 16 years.

It is at the JCC where I learned the meaning of Tzedakah – the root word Tzedek – the Jewish Duty to act with charity, righteousness, to seek Justice, to help others. It is at the JCC that I learned Tikkun Olam, that it is my duty to “repair the world.”

It is these tenets that guide my practice every day – as a public defender. I work exclusively with youth, from young children up to the age of 25 who cannot afford an attorney. I sit with them in foster care, in detention centers, in some of the lowest, loneliest, and scariest moments of their lives.

Many, if not most, of the youth I represent and their families and their communities – do not have a JCC equivalent. They do not have that support; the breadth of services my mom and I were lucky to receive from this place.

I have the unique perspective of being able to tell you that I am a ***testament to the benefit of the JCC*** – and I see every single day the ***major consequences*** for those who struggle without.

In today's world, we are living at a time when Jews – but not JUST Jews – really community as a whole – need each other and need support amongst each other the most.

You now have a responsibility. Your vote either demonstrates those tenets, that commitment to helping and building community, or you can vote to build barriers.

Please support the JCC. Please align the comprehensive plan and land use maps to reflect that reality and ensure the J can continue to serve our community and thrive on Mercer Island for the next 55 years.

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Leslie Somerstein