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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

October 24, 2023

Whatcom County Executive and
Health and Community Services Dept.
311 Grand Avenue, Suite 108
Bellingham, WA 98225

Dear Executive Sidhu and Whatcom County Health and Community Services Staff,

The Whatcom County Council would like to express its sincere gratitude and support for the efforts of the County Executive and Health and Community Services staff to address the needs of those living unsheltered in Whatcom County by providing for the upcoming severe weather shelter.

Each year, extreme winter weather creates dangerous conditions for the County's most vulnerable populations, especially those experiencing homelessness. Since 2022, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Whatcom County increased 27 percent. The most recent point-in-time count, taken January 26, 2023, found 1,059 individuals experiencing homelessness. Of those surveyed for the count, 39 percent reported being unsheltered, meaning they spent the night outdoors, in vehicles, or in other places not intended for habitation. Health and Community Services staff work year-round to coordinate a winter response that ensures individuals experiencing homelessness in our community have a safe, warm place to go when temperatures drop and conditions become unsafe.

The Whatcom County Council commends the Executive and Health and Community Services staff for their initiative in establishing a County-operated severe weather shelter to protect our community's most at-risk individuals. After a request for proposals to establish a severe weather shelter within Bellingham city limits went unanswered earlier this year, staff took the necessary steps to fill the need in the community. Staff is working to locate a suitable shelter space, and they are currently in the process of hiring additional temporary employees to make certain the facility is ready for operation before inclement weather strikes.

This Council is truly appreciative of the creative solutions and decisive action taken by the County Executive and Health and Community Services staff to prepare for the safety of all our community members this winter.

Respectfully,

Barry Buchanan, Chair
Whatcom County Council

Cc: Correspondence File, AB2023-704