

CLERK OF THE COUNCIL
Dana Brown-Davis, C.M.C.

COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Suite #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010



COUNCILMEMBERS
Barry Buchanan
Tyler Byrd
Todd Donovan
Ben Elenbaas
Carol Frazey
Kaylee Galloway
Kathy Kershner

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

June 7, 2023

Dawn Marie Rubio, J.D.
State Court Administrator
Administrative Office of the Courts
1112 Quince St. SE
P.O. Box 41170
Olympia, WA 98504-1170

Dear Ms. Rubio,

The Whatcom County Council supports the District Court application to the Administrative Office of the Courts for state appropriation funds for the purposes of increasing resources to better serve growing numbers of participants in Mental Health Court (MHC). Some specific items requested in this application are funding for a Mental Health Court Probation Officer, substance testing, staff training, and program implementation expenses and supplies.

Since 2015, Whatcom County's MHC has been a therapeutic court designed to provide wraparound support and intervene when someone's mental health challenges have brought them into the judicial system. MHC seeks to promote engagement in mental health care, recovery, and wellness to both prevent future involvement in the judicial system and build capacity for healthy, independent living. MHC serves Whatcom County adult residents with serious mental illness who have current legal charges pending in Whatcom County. These individuals have a high likelihood for further legal charges without intervention. The MHC team collaborates with and provides mutual support services and staffing to both the Whatcom County District Court Mental Health Court and the Bellingham Municipal Court Mental Health Wellness Court.

Each team consists of a Judicial Officer, a Whatcom County Health Department Program Manager, a Behavioral Health Specialist, a Prosecutor, a Public Defender, Probation Officers, and various case workers from local agencies. District Court currently has 28 participants, with a specific plan to increase to 35 within the next couple of months. Bellingham Municipal Court currently has six participants and is working to identify appropriate participants to increase to full capacity, which is 15. The MHC team collaborates with community partners to provide assessments in the jail as well as in the community, along with ongoing services that include both inpatient and outpatient services, medication assessment and treatment, therapy, case management, and care coordination. Community mental health providers are also part of the MHC team for staffing and response in court.

The Whatcom County Council believes in the work of the MHC and, therefore, requests your support and approval of the District Court's application for state appropriation funds.

Sincerely,

Barry Buchanan,
Whatcom County Council, Chair