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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL

July 27, 2021

Michelle Weatherly, Facilities Program Manager
Health Systems Quality Assurance
Washington State Department of Health
michelle.weatherly@doh.wa.gov

Dear Ms. Weatherly:

The recent opiate crisis has left few families untouched by the loss of human lives and other damage from addiction to opiates and opiate overdoses. Bellingham and Whatcom County citizens have witnessed strong surges in opioid use over the last several years, often young people, many of whom started with prescription medications. Regardless of how the use began, our community needs to embrace every best practice method at our disposal to ensure that people with opiate use disorders (OUD) obtain treatment and interventions with a proven history of effectiveness.

One such treatment method is methadone maintenance which has a high proven efficacy for people with OUDs. While some people with OUDs have found relief with certain forms of medication, methadone maintenance is a well-researched effective treatment option for many other people. Bringing a full-service opiate treatment program (a program which provides the full constellation of medications and counseling to treat opiate addiction) into the County will ensure that every individual has access to a treatment option in our community. People with OUDs whose time has been consumed by their daily efforts to get back and forth to a program in another county will be able to enter into sustained, long term recovery. The results of a community lacking this critical tool (methadone maintenance) show up as increases in criminal behavior, anti-social behavior, arrests, jail bookings, and emergency department visits.

For these reasons, the Whatcom County Council supports Acadia Healthcare, operating as Bellingham Treatment Solutions, which has proposed to open an opioid treatment program (OTP) in north Bellingham. Acadia Healthcare is the largest methadone maintenance provider in the U.S. with vast experience in assuring the effectiveness of their programs. Their program includes providing comprehensive treatment to include all forms of medication assisted treatment (MAT) for substance use disorders, employing a full medical and clinical management team, care coordination and case management services, multi-disciplinary team planning, follow up lab testing and urine screens, and partnering with businesses and other community partners. We need businesses in our community that provide essential behavioral health services for our citizens, such as the one this full-service opiate treatment provider can bring to us.

Respectfully,

Barry Buchanan, Chair
Whatcom County Council