

**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**

Rud Browne  
Barry Buchanan  
Tyler Byrd  
Todd Donovan  
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Kathy Kershner

**WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL**

May 20, 2020

Governor Jay Inslee  
Office of the Governor  
P.O. Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee,

We are coming to you as a council to ask that special consideration and accommodations be made to support families in Whatcom County during these times of COVID-19 restrictions. It has been brought to our attention that as a direct result of some of the state's COVID-19 precautions, families involved in the dependency court process are being disproportionately, and unintentionally, negatively impacted.

One impact we would like to bring to your attention involves family visitation between biological family members and their children in foster care. Families are "allowed" to meet; however, meeting sites are limited and not widely available. For example, families are able to meet at the local Department of Children, Youth, and Families offices, but meeting space at this local location is limited and is assigned priority to Whatcom County families. Many foster families in Whatcom County support children from other counties. This means that families/social workers are scrambling to come up with safe places for in-person visitation. It is too cold to use public outdoor spaces and other options are closed for the immediate future. This results in negative impacts on the children, their biological parents, and the foster families involved. We need safe, secure, and readily available meeting spaces to support these families.

In keeping with the intent of Whatcom County's Family and Child Action Plan, we are encouraging you to act swiftly in a solution that supports foster children and their families. Local jurisdictions should be allowed to offer families/social workers the use of currently closed public spaces like library meeting rooms, city halls, and council chambers. Precautions can be made to ensure families are well supported in a safe manor.

We have to do better for these families. We ask that you make this a priority and take immediate action to clarify in your declarations that these types of meetings are allowable.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully,

Barry Buchanan, Chair  
Whatcom County Council

c: Whatcom County Councilmembers  
Whatcom County Executive  
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