

16
April 2, 2019

Senate Ways and Means Committee

Dear Senators Rolfes, Frockt, Braun, and Brown,

FILE UNDER AB _____
DATE RECEIVED: Anne Deacon - 4/2/2019
SUBMITTED BY: Health Department
☐ COUNCIL MEETING
☒ Health Board COMMITTEE
EXHIBIT: _____

We are writing in strident support of one-time operational funding of \$1 million for the Whatcom County Crisis Stabilization Facility proposed in the House operating biennial budget. This facility will offer a pilot project for individuals struggling with behavioral health crises who would be better served in treatment as opposed to incarceration or inpatient hospitalization.

The state is compiling daily financial fines as a result of the Trueblood lawsuit due to insufficient resources dedicated to timely mental health evaluations of individuals in county jails. The state is also facing challenges at Western State Hospital due to inadequate resources. Whatcom County's Crisis Stabilization Facility can serve to mitigate both these pressing concerns.

This facility will allow law enforcement to divert individuals from arrest and incarceration into community-based treatment under RCW 10.31.110. The facility will be certified as "Triage with Involuntary Placement" under the criminal code as opposed to the civil code. We believe it will be one of the first of its kind in the state. It will also divert individuals from hospital emergency departments and inpatient settings and provide effective, yet less costly stabilization and treatment. These measures will reduce the demand for in-jail mental health evaluations as well as mental health deterioration that leads to the need for state hospital care.

The move to fully integrated managed care creates some funding uncertainty over the next few years since these services are considered discretionary within available funds. It is clear that these services will save money and improve lives earlier, but it will take some time for the new system of publically-funded health care to smooth out all the challenges to unstable funding. It is critical that pilot projects like the Whatcom County Crisis Stabilization Facility are fully operational during this transitional phase.

Sincerely,

Whatcom County Council