



Peter Browning

Commissioner, Skagit County

Lisa Janicki

Commissioner, Skagit County

Ron Wesen

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Bill Aslett

Mayor, City of Burlington

Peter Donovan

Mayor, City of Mount Vernon

Julia Johnson

Mayor, City of Sedro-Woolley

Matt Miller

Mayor, City of Anacortes

July 18, 2024

Sue Birch, Director
Washington State Health Care Authority
Cherry Street Plaza
626 8th Avenue SE
Olympia, WA 98501

RE: Skagit County Public Health Medication Assisted Treatment Program Expansion

Dear Ms. Birch,

The North Star Leadership Team writes to support Skagit County Public Health’s request for \$1.5M in funding to expand the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) program administered at the Skagit County Community Justice Center, also known as the jail. Like many communities across our state, Skagit County has experienced a dramatic rise in fentanyl use and reported overdoses among our jail population. Expanding the MAT program would support our goals to reduce overdose and recidivism rates, increase follow-through with community providers post release, and improve behavioral health outcomes.

[North Star](#) is a community wide effort bringing together local government, behavioral health and housing providers, and the nonprofit community to provide effective care and services to those who need it most. Our public-private partnership has been incredibly valuable in securing resources and implementing solutions to tackle some of the most complex issues facing Skagit County. We recognize there are gaps in service when people with substance use disorders are booked into the jail without sufficient options for detox and recovery. Expanding the MAT program would help fill these gaps and allow us to provide the necessary care and support to the jail community. Additionally, it will help support their path to recovery and reduce the likelihood of relapse and recidivism.

Over the last year, the overdose rate in Skagit County has nearly doubled (150 in 2022 vs. 273 in 2023). Rates of reported overdoses in the Skagit County jail have reflected a similar increase (zero in 2021 vs. 6 in 2023). The increase of fentanyl in our community has had a substantial impact and many individuals test positive for fentanyl when being booked into jail. On average, 66% of our incarcerated population is diagnosed with a substance use disorder (SUD). To mitigate the short and long-term health effects and support our jail population diagnosed with SUD, Skagit County has built a strong partnership between the Community Justice Center and the Public Health Department. Together, they work to connect people with resources including homeless services, outreach workers, recovery cafes, support groups, veterans’ services,



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and other organizations. Expansion of the MAT program will help individuals successfully transition back into their communities.

We fully support the proposed expansion of the MAT program at Skagit County Public Health and believe it will have a significant impact on our community. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

NORTH STAR LEADERSHIP TEAM



Peter Browning, Chair



Lisa Janicki, Commissioner



Ron Wesen, Commissioner



Bill Aslett, Mayor
City of Burlington



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