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The Tulalip Tribes are federally recognized successors in interest to the Snohomish, Snoqualmie, Skykomish, and other allied tribes and bands signatory to the Treaty of Point Elliott.

October 25, 2024

Teresa Mosqueda  
King County Councilmember  
516 Third Ave., Room 1200  
Seattle, WA 98104  
[teresa.mosqueda@kingcounty.gov](mailto:teresa.mosqueda@kingcounty.gov)

**Re: Tulalip Tribes Support for Seattle Indian Health Board in Building In-Patient Treatment Center**

Dear King County Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda,

The Tulalip Tribes writes this letter in response to express strong support for the Seattle Indian Health Board (SIHB) and its efforts to locate a 92-bed in-patient behavioral health treatment center on Vashon Island to address the fentanyl and opioid crisis in Washington State. The facility will be called the Thunderbird Treatment Center (TTC).

The Tulalip Tribes are the successors in interest to the Snohomish, Snoqualmie, Skykomish, and other allied bands signatory to the 1855 Treaty of Point Elliott. The United States Constitution recognizes three distinct sovereigns in addition to the Federal government: the several states, foreign nations, and Indian Tribes. As a sovereign government, Tulalip Tribes has been governing similar to those of other sovereign governments for thousands of years and has had its current government under a constitution approved by the Secretary of Interior since 1936, exercising its powers to best serve the needs of its tribal community and tribal members. The Tulalip community is located on a 22,000-acre Reservation bordering on the east to Interstate 5 corridor, 35 miles north of Seattle. Tulalip has approximately 5300 enrolled tribal members.

The Tulalip Tribes, like other Washington Tribes, are in a crisis, witnessing firsthand the devastating impact of fentanyl and opioid addiction on our tribal members and non-tribal community members that reside on the Tulalip Indian Reservation. The illicit drugs are not coming from within, our tribal lands are being targeted by organized crime because of the jurisdictional complexities and lack of parity in federal law. As a result, our native communities are being disproportionately impacted by the opioid-fentanyl epidemic. According to the CDC, Native people in Washington die of opioid overdoses at a rate five times higher than the state average. This epidemic has fractured families, eroded cultural foundations, left hundreds of native children without parents, and undermined the health and wellbeing of our communities.

In recent years, the Tulalip Tribes along with many other Washington Tribes have been on the forefront of addressing the opioid crisis. We have held pharmaceutical companies accountable for introducing opioids at unprecedented levels into our communities. We have worked tirelessly with Washington's local and state governments, as well as Congress, to pass legislation that gives us an opportunity to address this crisis, among other efforts. This work will continue.

The opioid crisis has been devastating for the Tulalip community hard. In October 2023, the Tulalip Tribes called for a Public Health Emergency due to the high usage of Opioids. Since the use of Fentanyl started in 2017, Tulalip has lost over 70 members due to fentanyl, many of which have been from overdose. We work pro-actively on our reservation to overcome this epidemic in coordination with other tribes, organizations and Washington state. In August 2023, Tulalip hosted the first National Opioid Summit to discuss meaningful solutions with members of Congress and Washington state officials. One of the main impediments expressed by tribal leaders at this summit was the lack of access to in-patient treatment beds.

The lack of accessible beds and culturally competent treatment options has only exacerbated the opioid crisis for our tribal members. Between January 2024 to July 2024, Tulalip Tribes had 84 tribal members who needed in-patient treatment beds. We had to send 42 tribal members out of Washington state due to lack of beds that take Medicaid. The Tulalip Tribes paid for these tribal members with its business revenues due to the lack of resources in Washington State, taking away critical resources from other Tulalip social service programs.

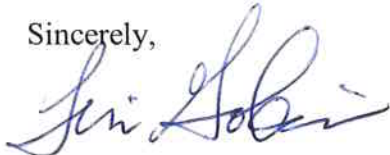
We have recently learned of opposition from a small group of Vashon residents who have taken action to hinder the opening of the TTC. We urge you not to be deterred from supporting the SIHB's efforts to open the TTC. The objections raised by some residents' pale compared to the overwhelming support the SIHB has garnered from tribal communities and beyond in opening the TTC on Vashon Island. For Native Americans, this treatment center is not just about addressing a public health crisis, it is about reclaiming our cultural identity, restoring dignity to those struggling with addiction, and securing a brighter future for generations to come; The opioid crisis is affecting all Washingtonians. Again, there is far more support for opening this facility than those residents who are against opening it.

Time is of the essence. For nearly 30 years, the Seattle Indian Health Board has provided in-patient care through the Thunderbird Treatment Center, until it was determined that a new facility was needed to meet the needs of our communities. SIHB has found that facility, it's time to move as quickly as possible to get it operating. The Tulalip Tribes has engaged with the SIHB and other federally recognized Tribes in Washington on the re-opening of the new Thunderbird Treatment Center (TTC) because it is critical in increasing accessibility to behavioral health treatment for AI/AN people throughout Washington state. Not re-opening the facility will have devastating impacts for generations to come such as high rates of Native children placed in foster care due to parents being placed in treatment. TTC will have a dedicated wing for expecting parents, parents, and children, allowing parents to seek treatment while still parenting, thus promoting healthy living for our native communities.

We urge you to work with the Seattle Indian Health Board to ensure there are no delays in its operation on Vashon Island. Tulalip Tribes strongly supports this facility for the reasons set forth above.

We thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions or need further follow up, please contact the Tribal Chair Teri Gobin at [tgobin@tulaliptribes-nsn.gov](mailto:tgobin@tulaliptribes-nsn.gov) or contact Summer Hammons, Legislative Policy Analyst at [Summerh@tulaliptribes-nsn.gov](mailto:Summerh@tulaliptribes-nsn.gov) or Jeremy Howell (Health Administrator) [jhowell@tulaliptribes-nsn.gov](mailto:jhowell@tulaliptribes-nsn.gov)

Sincerely,



Teri Gobin,  
Tulalip Tribal Chairwoman

CC:

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