



2000 Hospital Drive
Sedro-Woolley, Washington
98284-4327

TEL: (360) 856-6021
FAX: (360) 856-7204
www.unitedgeneral.org

February 28, 2013

Ms. Kathleen Taylor, Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union of Washington Foundation
901 Fifth Avenue, Suite 630
Seattle, WA 98164

Re: PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center Agreement to Lease and Operate United General Hospital

Dear Ms. Taylor:

Thank you for your February 8, 2013, letter to the Skagit County Hospital District # 304 Commissioners and Greg Reed, Chief Executive Officer, concerning the lease and operating agreement for United General Hospital to be entered into between the district and PeaceHealth. This letter responds on behalf of the Board of Commissioners and also provides some perspective on the reasons for the Board of Commissioners' decision to move ahead with this arrangement.

Providing rural health care is difficult today and will be even more challenging in the future. Continued operation of United General Hospital and the District's continued service to its communities is at risk. This transaction will use District funds to help preserve access to healthcare services in the District for its resident and support continuity of care between services that can be offered in the District and specialty services offered by PeaceHealth physicians and facilities, both important goals of the District. PeaceHealth currently owns or operates four critical access hospitals in Alaska, Washington and Oregon, and thus, brings operations expertise. The arrangement can improve quality and create efficiencies for the delivery of services, all of which is very important to everyone in the region.

It is important to note that this transaction is the result of over four years of the District and PeaceHealth working together to consider the feasibility of the proposed arrangements and the benefits to the District and PeaceHealth. It is a relationship that has been carefully chosen by the Board of Commissioners as the best option among the available options to help stabilize and allow for continued access by Sedro-Woolley and Skagit County residents to essential health care.

Your letter raises a concern that services to District residents will be lost or restricted, specifically, that there would be diminished availability of women's reproductive services and end-of-life services due to the religious values of PeaceHealth. First it should be clarified that United General Hospital does not offer gynecological services currently and therefore women's reproductive services will not be lost. Long before discussion began with PeaceHealth, the Board of Commissioners of the District had adopted a policy to the effect that assisted suicide as permitted under Washington's Death with Dignity Act would not be offered at United General Hospital. The policy reflected the view of the



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Commissioners that these services are most appropriately provided in the context of a physician – patient relationship, and in any event the policy does not reflect a particular religious view. Others have raised concerns in connection with the transaction related to the possibility of discrimination against patients and employees based on sexual and gender preference because of the religious values of PeaceHealth, an issue not raised in your letter. We would like to assure you that the District and PeaceHealth are each committed to providing care to all individuals in need of care, importantly, without regard to the ability to pay for care, and without regard to race, color, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or national origin. Each organization operates under employment policies (and applicable laws) that prohibit discrimination in employment and help ensure a diverse and compassionate workforce.

Your letter contains legal assertions that the proposed agreements violate the Washington State Constitution and state law (the Reproductive Privacy Act and the Death with Dignity Act) through the use of the District's public funds to restrict services on religious grounds. As outlined briefly above, the proposed arrangement does nothing of the kind. We also do not agree with your interpretation of the Washington State Constitution and these state laws, as they apply to the District and the proposed transaction. The Board of Commissioners will continue to pursue its statutory purpose to provide health care services meeting the needs of the District.

You mentioned your organization's request for public records. We believe we have responded to your request with copies of the existing agreements and we will provide copies of additional documents as they are finalized. Please advise us if this is not the case.

I hope this helps satisfy your concerns. We remain open to further dialogue and appreciate your interest in Skagit County health care.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chuck Ruhl".

Chuck Ruhl, President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregory C. Reed".

Gregory C. Reed, Superintendent/CEO

cc: Jeri Kaufman
Gary I. Kent
Robert M. Stanley
David Walker