

November 18, 2022

Snohomish County Council members  
Everett City Council members  
Attn: Megan Dunn, Snohomish County Council Chair  
3000 Rockefeller Avenue, M/S #609  
Everett, WA 98201

Re: Response to your letter on Nov. 15, 2022

To the members of the Snohomish County Council and Everett City Council,

We have received your letter and appreciate the concern you have for the health and wellbeing of our community. We share your concerns about the sustainability of hospitals and health care systems in Washington state and the nation, as facilities and providers across the health care continuum, from acute care to skilled nursing facilities, are facing immense operational and financial challenges.

Providence Regional Medical Center Everett admitted approximately 30,000 patients last year and had nearly 500,000 outpatient visits. Our Emergency Department is one of the busiest in the state and had about 80,000 patient visits in 2021. We are proud of our history as a leading health care provider in Snohomish County and consider it a privilege to serve our community.

However, like all health care organizations in the U.S., Providence Everett has been heavily impacted by the pandemic. Providence Everett was the first hospital in the nation with a confirmed case of COVID-19. In addition to being at the center of the pandemic, more patients are coming in with more advanced diseases, hospitals' finances have been devastated by inflation and stagnant reimbursement rates, and healthcare staff are leaving the workforce nationwide. In fact, the International Council of Nursing estimates a worldwide shortage of 13 million nurses by 2030, and analysts [predict a shortage](#) of up to 450,000 nurses in the U.S. by 2025.

Additionally, in line with other large health systems across the country, [Providence has reported](#) significant operating losses this year, due to sharply increasing workforce costs, supply costs, and shrinking reimbursement. Through the first nine months of the year, the Providence health system experienced a net operating loss of \$1.1 billion. Providence has

implemented a new operating model to better respond to the fast-changing health care landscape, which includes a significant reduction in executive and administrative staff, managing our use of costly agency labor (travelers), and investing in our frontline caregivers. Even so, through September of this year, Providence Everett has lost more than \$110 million in 2022. If losses like these continue for hospitals, more services will be reduced or closed across the country, and there are likely to be long-term impacts on availability of health care services to patients and communities.

While we don't have immediate control over many of the pressures in the current healthcare environment, we continue to focus our energy on the things we do have control over. It's critical to innovate for the future, and that's exactly what Providence is doing.

We have comprehensive plans in place to address recruitment and retention, while also implementing innovative new care models to best use our resources. Each of these efforts is being informed by frontline staff, and we have new processes in place to increase transparency and accountability for our leadership teams in being responsive to the ideas of all our caregivers. Providence Everett is an anchor health care institution in Snohomish County, and we all need to work together to find solutions and ensure we can continue our Mission to serve everyone in the community, especially the poor and vulnerable.

#### **Some highlights of our plan include:**

- ***Listening to frontline staff.*** I (Kristy Carrington) began my career as a nurse caring for neurology patients, trauma patients, cardiac patients, and more, and I know how important it is for caregivers to be heard and supported. As the new interim Chief Executive, I have been rounding with our new Chief Nursing Officer (CNO), talking with frontline nurses and other health care workers, holding monthly caregiver open forums, and have implemented new structures to track ideas that frontline nurses generate.

These ideas are then shared and updated weekly for our nurses to see what has been put into action, what has already been addressed, and what we continue to explore. We will be expanding this tool to all caregivers starting in January 2023. This level of transparency adds accountability for leadership and is critical to building a culture of trust. Our new CNO has also been meeting with frontline nurses from various units through staffing committees and other venues to solicit feedback and suggestions for improving morale and access to care for the community.

- ***Reimagining care delivery.*** As we respond to the nursing shortage, our goal is to keep nurses working at the top of their license by augmenting our care teams with other clinical roles to support patient care. These care models best utilize our caregivers' skills and help them do the work they are most qualified to do. Ideas on

how to do this have been discussed in our staffing committees and from these ideas, we've already implemented several, including: Increasing our number of Nursing Assistants Certified (NACs); implementing a training program for NACs; hiring nursing students from local nursing schools as Nurse Techs to be a part of our care teams, which allows them to work to their verified education and skill level to build their competencies and creates a pipeline into our nurse residency program; utilizing Licensed Practical Nurses in various units throughout the hospital; and exploring alternative work schedules that staff have asked for, such as short shifts, job sharing, remote nursing positions, and leveraging technology to reduce nurse workloads.

- ***Working with our union partners.*** We share common goals with our represented caregivers: providing excellent care to our patients and making Providence a great place to work. We cannot provide safe, high-quality care without supported and engaged caregivers.

We know that staffing has been a challenge and we are listening to concerns from frontline and represented caregivers. To help with retention, we have implemented an extra shift incentive program for many caregivers, including all nursing staff. This incentive program offers double time to RNs who take extra shifts above the full-time schedule.

This year, more than 1,900 of our caregivers represented by UFCW Professional, Technical, and OPEIU unions, had open contracts, and we engaged them in expedited negotiations and quickly agreed on new contracts. Whether expedited or not, Providence, and hopefully our union partners, always set a goal to negotiate our union contracts by the expiration of our agreements so that our caregivers receive any wage increases in a timely fashion. We're not opposed to exploring the option of expedited bargaining with our partners at UFCW 3000 for our upcoming RN negotiations in 2023.

- ***Competitive wages and pay.*** Providence is the second-largest employer in Snohomish County and provides market-competitive pay and excellent benefits. For example, the average full-time nurse working 36 hours per week at PRMCE makes over \$100,000 a year, plus benefits, before any other additional shift incentives. This has allowed Providence Everett to continue recruiting and hiring new nurses in Everett, despite an incredibly competitive and dynamic labor market for nurses across the country. Providence has also provided additional benefits throughout the pandemic – that continue today – to help with childcare and elder care, behavioral health with 25 free visits for our caregivers and their dependents each year, tuition reimbursement, free health coverage for qualifying caregivers, learning and development programs, and much more.

**With these changes, we are making progress.** There are still many headwinds, but we are seeing signs of hope in many areas. For example:

- Providence Everett has hired more than 1,300 new caregivers this year, including more new nurses and nursing assistants in October than in any other month this year. We are also aiming to double our number of nurse residents and fellows (from 20 per quarter to 40), which will help us increase the number of core staff at the hospital.
- We are working with both Everett Community College and Everett High School to create pipelines in health care careers, and we [partner with multiple schools as a clinical site](#) to ensure more students can get the hands-on, practical education they need to complete their licensure or certification programs.
- At PRMCE, we have seen our overall turnover rate decrease slightly over the last 3 months. This is a sign that our retention efforts are working to add stability to our workforce, and we remain steadfast in continuing to target decreased turnover rates.
- In 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, we used the [Providence Institute for a Healthier Community](#) Health & Well-being Monitor to survey Providence Everett caregivers about how they are doing (physically, emotionally, financially, and more). We have continued doing this survey annually ever since and use the data to inform our efforts, including creating Caregiver Resource Groups for specific populations of caregivers, directing the work of our Diversity and Well-being Committee comprised of frontline caregivers, offering financial education classes, and creating a Caregiver Resource Hub to help caregivers navigate the many resources and benefits available to them.
- We continue to focus on our hospital throughput to ensure we can keep our Emergency Department wait times as low as possible. We have been able to move more patients to post-acute settings through partnerships with community providers and state agencies. We have also opened a transitional care unit on our Pacific campus to care for patients who do not need acute care. This is critical to ensuring we maintain the capacity to care for patients who need acute care services and emergency services, like patients needing stroke, heart attack, trauma, and birthing care.
- Our patient quality scores highlight that we continue to provide excellent care to our patients. In 2022, U.S. News & World Report once again named Providence Everett a Best Regional Hospital in the Seattle Metro area, and we ranked as High Performing in 10 different procedures and conditions, including heart attack and stroke. In addition, this year, the American Heart Association again recognized PRMCE with the *Get With the Guidelines: Stroke Gold Plus Award*, and we recently reached our lowest sepsis mortality ratio, showing significant improvement from where we were just a few months ago.

- Despite the challenging health care landscape, we remain committed to our Mission to remain steadfast in serving all, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. In 2021, we **provided \$89 million in community benefit** in Snohomish County. This includes \$67 million in unfunded costs of Medicaid and other government-sponsored care, as well as \$11.1 million in free and discounted care for patients who are uninsured or underinsured.

**Challenges remain – and we need your partnership.** There is still much work to do to solidify these successes, grow them, and to continue to learn from our caregivers as we look for new opportunities to tackle operational issues with creativity and compassion. We welcome your collaboration and support as we move forward. Hospitals are a critical community infrastructure, and we need short- and long-term solutions to ensure Washington hospitals can continue to provide life-saving care and hospital staff can receive relief from an overburdened system.

Areas where we would welcome your partnership include:

- Advocating with state lawmakers for policy solutions to address workforce challenges in hospitals through supporting the “Keep Washington #1 for Nurses” package, which has three major goals: retain nurses working in Washington hospitals, attract already trained nurses to come to work in Washington hospitals, and add new nurses through investments in workforce development. The package includes several policies that we believe will help build on what works to recruit and retain caregivers while expanding the pipeline of health care workers, including:
  - Establishing a new public private partnership program for student loan repayment assistance for nurses employed in Washington hospitals;
  - Establishing a statewide collaborative to investigate and spread innovations in hospital staffing;
  - Joining the Nurse Licensure compact to ease the way for nurses in other states to come to Washington;
  - Requiring traveler agency transparency and enacting new regulations on agency contracting practices to promote direct hiring of nurses at hospitals; and
  - Increasing the capacity of nursing education and clinical practice programs by developing regional collaboratives between nursing schools and clinical placement partners, standardizing clinical placement requirements across educational institutions, and expanding the Washington State Nursing Preceptorship Incentive Program.

We are also exploring legislation to modify RN educational requirements providing clinical rotation credit for hours worked as a nurse tech in an acute care environment, to ease the path of nurse techs pursuing an RN license.

- Advocating for increased state funding to support community resources, like adult family homes and skilled nursing facilities, for people who do not need to be in the hospital. We continue to have many medically stable, ready-to-discharge patients who do not have a safe place in the community to be discharged to. Stabilizing these other care settings ensures hospital beds and resources are there for those needing hospital care.

The challenges facing the health of our communities are daunting. But with these challenges comes a pivotal opportunity to collaborate and re-envision the future of health care. We hope you will stand with us as a partner in this journey to help ensure Providence Everett continues to provide excellent care to Everett, Snohomish County and the greater Northwest for generations to come.

Thank you,

Kristy Carrington, RN, MBA, Interim Chief Executive, Providence Swedish North Puget Sound

Tony Ohl, Chair, Providence Northwest Washington Service Area Community Mission Board