

500 5th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

December 7, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

We are the career service physicians of the Jail Health Services (JHS) medical provider group, writing to express our utmost admiration and support for our JHS nursing colleagues, as well as our significant concerns about the impacts of the ongoing jail staffing crisis on retention of our most seasoned and experienced nursing staff.

JHS nursing staff are on the front lines of every aspect of healthcare delivery in the jail. They complete patient assessments in booking, perform critical life-saving measures during medical emergencies, and provide many other essential, round-the-clock services in between. JHS nurses care for some of the most medically, psychiatrically, and behaviorally complex and unstable patients anywhere in the state. They have continued this challenging work in person all through the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing severe corrections staffing crisis in the jail.

As JHS physicians, we rely daily on our nursing colleagues to help us gather critical assessment data about our patients. In addition to their clinical skills, the most experienced JHS nurses understand the unique social dynamics of the jail, and the many and varied factors that can come to bear on patients' physical and mental health in the jail setting. These nurses are our eyes and ears throughout the facility, and they are often our patients' most passionate advocates.

Not just anyone is suited to this unique and challenging work. In addition to their excellent clinical skills, JHS nurses must also possess a special blend of compassion, intelligence, intuition, and grit—a constellation of traits that takes years to develop. The jail setting can be hazardous and frightening, and is also highly nuanced; career service nurses who have worked in the jail for years and in some cases decades care deeply about the population we serve and have accumulated a degree of institutional knowledge that is truly invaluable. Even the most highly skilled agency or new hire nurse will take years to get up to speed on all the particulars of our unique setting.

As you well know, the jail is in the midst of a severe staffing crisis. While the primary driver of this has been on the corrections side, DAJD and JHS operations are inextricably intertwined. The critical DAJD staffing shortage has decimated JHS's capacity to deliver the high quality health care services we have always prided ourselves on providing. Being forced to provide substandard care has been devastating to nursing morale. In addition, the DAJD staffing crisis has contributed to conditions that are dangerous for patients, officers, and nurses alike. Combined with the stressors of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and attendant economic

issues like historically high costs of every day expenses including housing, gas, and food, our nursing staff is nearing a breaking point, and unfortunately we have already lost too many experienced JHS nurses as a result.

Some of these stressors are not unique to our setting, and in response we have seen several area hospitals and nurses' unions recently implement historic wage increases on the order of 20-31%--a necessary step to attract and retain high quality nursing staff in today's challenging market. While at first blush such increases may sound cost prohibitive, the cost of paying a competitive wage to retain our experienced nurses pales in comparison to the far greater expenses of paying even higher wages to temporary agency nurses, repeatedly recruiting and training new hires, and dealing with the costly downstream medical and legal fallout associated with the inherently inferior nursing care that would be provided by less experienced nurses who are unfamiliar with our unique and complex setting.

As JHS physicians, we cannot overstate the value that experienced JHS nurses bring to our practice. With the current staffing crisis, JHS and the King County Jail are already teetering on the precipice of disaster, and we can ill afford to lose even one more seasoned JHS nurse. The current negotiations between King County and WSNA must yield an increase in compensation for our nurses that is both commensurate with the tremendous value they bring to our practice, and also reflective of the historic financial stressors our nurses are facing. Otherwise, we fear that many of our remaining experienced nurses will be left with little choice but to look elsewhere for fair compensation, and the crisis in the jail will only be worsened.

We thank you for your time and implore you to see the importance of retaining our most experienced and valued JHS nursing staff. Any employer would be lucky to have these highly skilled and experienced nurses, and it is imperative for our practice, our patients, and our community, that we do all we can to retain them.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kim Concannon
Dr. Julia Graham
Dr. Jennifer Jones-Vanderleest
Dr. Benjamin Sanders
Dr. Wayne Webster