



March 10, 2020

The Honorable Doug Richardson, Chair  
and Members  
Pierce County Council  
930 Tacoma Ave. S., Room 1046  
Tacoma, WA 98402

Re: Proposed Ordinance 2020-24s

Dear Pierce County Council:

It is the hope of the League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County that today you will adopt Proposed Ordinance 2020-24s, and in particular, the local option 1/10 of one percent sales tax for behavioral health. This action is long overdue and we urge you to join the other western Washington Counties in adopting this tax and improve the behavioral health services in this county. As the second largest county in the state, with demonstrable needs for increased behavioral health services, Pierce County would be remiss in not taking this action now.

In 2016, the League published its year-long study of mental health in Pierce County. Our findings were that many additional mental health services and a coordinating body are needed in Pierce County. The list included about a dozen types of services that were not provided at that time and were badly needed by County residents.

Later that same year, Pierce County engaged a consultant and conducted its own study. This study found many of the same gaps in services needed in Pierce County.

Ever since that time, we have urged the County Council to adopt the 1/10 of one percent local option mental health tax to address these issues. We made a substantial presentation to this committee in October 2016. At that time, we urged the following:

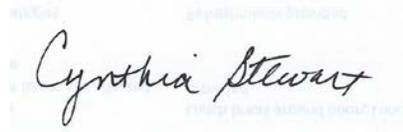
- Adoption of the two 0.1% sales taxes – not just the mental health tax, but also the affordable/supportive housing .1% sales tax
- Simultaneous formation of coordination committee, a general implementation schedule, and a citizen input process
- Development of service funding priorities
- Development of a data analysis plan for ongoing review of system
- Work with State of WA to increase Mental Health funding statewide and improve training resources
- Lobby State and Federal governments for increased Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rates
- Work with State Insurance Commissioner to ensure true Parity in Mental Health care

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Since 2016, the mental health system has changed significantly. We refer now to “behavioral health”, rather than mental health, and behavioral health and physical health are combined in delivery of services. Nevertheless, there are people in need who are still not receiving good case management and proper treatment and there remains a gap in coordination of services that the County should address. Additional funding for these services remains a high priority.

We urge you to join the other urbanized counties in Washington State in implementing this tax to support badly needed improvements in behavioral health services for county residents. We support the formation of a Coordinating Commission to analyze the County’s behavioral health needs and propose allocation of funds accordingly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cynthia Stewart". The signature is written in a cursive style. The signature is centered on a light blue background that has some faint, illegible text or a watermark.

Cynthia Stewart, President