

MEMORANDUM

TO: King County Councilmembers

FROM: Saul Petersky, Mental Health Specialist II – Harborview Respite, MSW Student – UW School of Social Work, Practicum Student – UW Addictions, Drug and Alcohol Institute, Represented – WFSE Local 3488 (AFSCME), Precinct Committee Officer – 37th LD Democrats.

DATE: April 17, 2024

SUBJECT: DEFEND RESPITE EXPANSION IN THE HARBORVIEW BOND PROJECT

Summary

In 2024, King County Council will issue an executive decision to approve a revised Harborview Bond Project Recommended Project Plan. I urge you to vote no on the Recommended Project Plan unless it includes a 150-bed expansion of the Harborview Respite Program.

Given the passage of HB 2348, King County will refinance capital expenses related to the Harborview Capital Bond Project with existing revenue from county property taxes. Despite the availability of this additional funding, the Harborview Ordinance Workgroup (OWG) could choose to prioritize other capital improvements and continue to exclude a 150-bed expansion of Respite from their Recommended Project Plan.

While HB 2348 offers promising financial support for the Harborview Bond Project, I am asking the County Council to reject OWG's Project Plan unless it includes Respite expansion.

Background

In April 2020, the plan to expand Respite to 150-beds within the Bond Project was solidified in a final Recommendation Report submitted to the Capital Planning Oversight Committee and the Harborview Board of Trustees. The original estimated cost for renovating or repurposing Harborview Hall to accommodate the expansion of Respite was projected at \$108 million, accounting for 6.2% of the total \$1.74 billion budget allocated for the Bond Project.¹

The County Council approved Ordinance 19117 on June 23, 2020. This ordinance enabled a property tax levy to fund the \$1.74 billion Bond Project. While acknowledging the importance of expanding Respite, the ordinance did not specifically mention it in the list of new constructions or renovations. Additionally, it allowed for the possibility of redirecting bond proceeds to other critical projects deemed “most necessary” if costs exceeded initial estimates.²

King County voters approved Proposition No. 1, also referred to as “Harborview Medical Center Health and Safety Improvement Bonds,” with a 76% majority during the November 2020 General Election. The campaign leading up to the vote emphasized the inclusion of a 150-bed expansion of Harborview Respite, highlighting its significance on the campaign website for Prop No. 1 and in local news publications like *The Seattle Times*, *The Stranger*, and *The Daily*.³

¹ [King County motion 15183, executive summary](#). (2020, April). *Harborview Capital Planning Leadership Group*.

² Dembowski, R., Kohl-Welles, J., & McDermott, J. (2020, June). [Ordinance 19117](#). *King County Council*.

³ Harborview Health for All. (2020, November). [About Prop 1](#). *HarborviewProp1.com*.

In late 2022, the consulting firm Vanir was commissioned by King County Executive's office to reassess the cost assumptions of the Bond Project, considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on supply chains, labor, and inflation. The review uncovered a substantial financial gap of \$890 million, including a \$55 million shortfall for the Harborview Respite expansion.

In response to escalating costs, King County Council and the Harborview Board of Trustees received briefings in February 2023 about the Bond Project's financial challenges.⁴ The Harborview Ordinance Workgroup (OWG), formed in March 2023, recommended in August against the 150-bed Respite expansion, instead focusing resources on the Base Tower Package to address the hospital's needs for single patient beds and emergency department capacity.⁵ The County Council unanimously approved this Recommended Project Plan in October 2023, marking a significant shift from earlier plans and expectations to expand Harborview Respite.

Argument and Evidence

In September 2023, OWG identified eight high-level RCW Funding Tools to bridge the \$890 million funding gap for the Bond Project. One of these tools includes the financing strategy proposed in HB 2348, allowing capital improvement projects to use County Hospital Maintenance Property Taxes.⁶ While HB 2348 presents a promising financial avenue to support the Bond Project, OWG is under no legal obligation to prioritize the Respite expansion over other First Tier priorities that were suggested if additional funding was obtained. King County Council has the sole decision-making power to save the expansion of Respite.

Despite challenges like inflation and higher labor costs, the current historically low-interest rate environment for general obligation bonds in Washington State presents an opportunity for substantial savings over the life of the Bond Project.⁷ Inflation cannot be controlled, but bond issuance and construction can be expedited to maximize taxpayers' re-payment of these bonds.

In Harborview's August 2023 Town Hall meeting, Harborview CEO Sommer Kleweno Walley stated the OWG would work "over the next couple of years to ensure we can get money to complete all the things we wanted to complete."⁸ Postponing the expansion of Respite's 150-bed capacity will worsen the ongoing cycle of hospital discharge and re-admission for people experiencing homelessness. This cycle cannot be addressed by any other of OWG's priorities. At 18-beds, Respite supply cannot meet demand. The time to expand Respite is now.

Evidence highlights the respite model's role in significantly lowering hospital re-admission rates and reducing inpatient days, translating to substantial cost savings. The respite model improves health outcomes and boosts access to housing stability for patients.⁹ The effectiveness of

Beekman, D. (2020, October). [Ballot measure would authorize property taxes for \\$1.74 billion Harborview Medical Center expansion](#). *The Seattle Times*.

Graham, N. (2020, October). [Harborview needs a \\$1.74 billion facelift](#). *The Stranger*.

Denton, A. (2020, October). [\\$1.74B Harborview bond measure would fund critical upgrades](#). *The Daily*.

⁴ [King County Harborview bond capital project briefing](#). (2020, February). *Harborview Board of Trustees*.

⁵ Carroll, K. & Goodhew, I. (2023, July). [Briefing: recommended project plan for Harborview Medical Center health and safety improvements](#). *King County Council Committee of the Whole*.

⁶ Harborview Ordinance Workgroup. (2023, September). [Table 8. county funding tools](#). *King County Council*.

⁷ Pellicciotti, M. (2024). [2024 debt and credit analysis – borrowing costs](#). *Washington State Treasurer*.

⁸ Kleweno Walley, S. (2023, August). [Harborview 2020 bond: re-scoping process](#). *Harborview Town Hall*.

⁹ Please see: American Society on Aging (2017), Basu (2021), Field (2019), and Shetler (2018) in [Medical respite literature review](#). (2021, March). *National Institute for Medical Respite Care*.

Harborview Respite's care model is demonstrated in completion rates for interventions like Outpatient Parenteral Antibiotic Therapy, with a success rate at 64%.¹⁰ Financially, a night at Harborview Respite costs roughly \$1,000 less than a hospital stay.¹¹ A retrospective review at Harborview revealed that post-surgery readmissions were often tied to homelessness.¹² Expanding Harborview Respite will improve healthcare outcomes, maximize cost-efficiency, and alleviate strain on hospital resources. As stewards of public health and Harborview's finances, it's essential for the County Council to defend the expansion of Respite.

Personal Testimonies

Since April 2023, I have served as a Mental Health Specialist at Harborview Respite, witnessing firsthand the challenges of limited bed capacity and the crucial need for expansion. From my perspective of working on the floor, the expansion of Respite will save lives in our region.

The shortage of beds at Respite was exacerbated as our current home at Jefferson Terrace began undergoing a remodeling process in 2022, slashing our bed count from 34 to 25 to 18. The current limitation of beds at Respite forces providers to choose between addressing chronic wounds, treating severe infections, and offering end-of-life care. There are only 344 emergency shelter beds eligible for drop-in or self-referral in Seattle for single adults over the age of 25.¹³ Medically fragile patients who still require wound care are discharged from Respite with a piece of paper listing these meager resources. Where do they go? The sidewalk outside Harborview.

Heather Gates, ARNP at Respite, testified at the House Local Government Public Hearing to support HB 2348: "Our patients [at Respite] are too sick to go to a shelter or to the streets... The need for these services and others is far greater than our current bed capacity."¹⁴

Several anonymous stakeholders voiced their support of expanding Respite in May-June 2023:¹⁵

- "Respite has to choose between housing either a chemo patient or hospice patient."
- "If there's a confluence of multiple epidemics, Respite will address the need."
- "Respite is the pinnacle of the hospital – it reduces stress on rest of hospital."
- "Placing beds... helps manage hospital surge; just 50 beds would be a critical help."

Conclusion

I support the vision for Harborview Medical Center's future as it was conceptualized by King County voters in 2020. I am asking the County Council to ensure that the most vulnerable people will not be left behind by the new implementation phase the of Harborview Capital Bond Project

¹⁰ Beielers et al. (2016). [Successful implementation of outpatient parenteral antimicrobial therapy at a medical respite facility for homeless patients](#). *Journal of Hospital Medicine*, 11(8), 531-535.

¹¹ Harborview Leadership Group. (2020, February). [Recommendation report](#). *King County Initiatives*.

¹² McIntyre et al. (2016). [Analysis of risk factors for patient readmission 30 days following discharge from general surgery](#). *JAMA Surgery*, 151(9), 855-861.

¹³ [Regional services database](#). (2023, June). King County Regional Homelessness Authority,

¹⁴ [HB 2354: Concerning county hospital funding](#). (January, 2024). *TVW - Washington Public Affairs Network*.

¹⁵ [Stakeholder engagement summary](#). (2023, June). *Harborview Bond Ordinance Workgroup*
[Appendix F: Engagement feedback comments](#). (2023, May). *Harborview Bond Ordinance Workgroup*.