



## NATHAN FLETCHER

SUPERVISOR, FOURTH DISTRICT  
San Diego County Board of Supervisors

June 10, 2019

Steve Dietlin, CEO  
Tri-City Medical Center  
4002 Vista Way  
Oceanside, CA 92056

Dear Mr. Dietlin:

As elected officials representing the San Diego County region, we have grave concerns about Tri-City's lack of commitment to providing critical emergency behavioral health beds. It is unacceptable to have a public hospital district abandon the people of North County it is charged with providing for. The publication of the recent Grand Jury Report titled, *San Diego Psychiatric Services: Tri-City's Shutdown of Psych Units...Tip of the Iceberg*, shines a light on the negative regional effects unleashed by Tri-City's decision to close its psychiatric units in October 2018.

Despite offers of assistance from County and State officials, you and your staff have failed to show substantive progress towards reinstating emergency behavioral health services at the Tri-City Medical Center. We understand that "conversations" are taking place, but we have sat patiently for six months waiting for movement and it is time for conversations to turn into a specific, realistic, and achievable action plan.

We request that you submit a comprehensive plan to the County's Director of Behavioral Health, Dr. Luke Bergmann, within 30 days of this correspondence, with a copy to each of us. Should you fail to do so, we will pursue legislative action beginning with a request for a state audit of the Tri-City Medical Center. A thorough and comprehensive review of the actions, conversations, correspondence, executive compensation, and billing practices of Tri-City will help provide a full and public accounting of all the reasons behind the closure of the behavioral health units. This audit will help us shape additional legislative remedies to ensure Tri-City meets its obligation to the public.

San Diego County's Behavioral Health System has been significantly compromised by Tri-City Medical Center's actions to close 18 in-patient beds and a 12 bed Crisis Stabilization Unit that served individuals in mental health crisis. Your decisions have created an untenable deficit of services in North County exasperating a mental health emergency system that was already overwhelmed. Local hospital emergency rooms, Psychiatric Emergency Response Teams, and law enforcement have been forced to deal with Tri-City's failure to provide these critical services, and the residents that you are charged with caring for are suffering as a result. Longer wait times at hospitals and extensive traveling required to other parts of the region are a direct result of Tri-City failing to meet its obligation to help behavioral health patients in crisis.

In the six months since you suspended operations of your Behavioral Health and Crisis Stabilization Units, citing new federal guidelines requiring capital improvements as a significant obstacle, the County has made

Steve Dietlin  
June 10, 2019  
Page 2

those same capital upgrades at the San Diego Psychological Hospital and obtained accreditation from Joint Commission this past February. This compliance is not unsurmountable. Further, we have brought an additional 20 in-patient beds since the closure of your inpatient unit in October with 20 more to be brought on online shortly. Despite this significant achievement, the closure of psychiatric beds at Tri-City during this same timeframe ensured no true regional progress as the gain was cancelled out by your deficit.

Unlike Tri-City, the County has made enhancing the Behavioral Health continuum of care a priority. The County's 2020 proposed budget includes a significant increase of \$50.3 million, bringing the total County allocation for behavioral health services to \$708.5 million. The commitment of general-purpose revenue has also increased by 20.5 percent over the previous year. San Diego County is also adding 123.5 new Behavioral Health positions and 177 mental health beds of various levels.

In short, the County is stepping up to meet the regional need and working to ensure everyone joins us in this effort. That is why we have repeatedly offered help and assistance in bringing Tri-City's services back online. We are here to help but cannot shoulder 100 percent of the burden toward a solution. As County and State officials representing this region, we are asking Tri-City to do its part contributing towards the emergency mental health needs of the residents you are charged with serving.

We recognize there are challenges with maintaining an inpatient and crisis stabilization unit, but other hospitals throughout San Diego have figured out how to make it work. Emergency mental health services are a critical service line that public hospitals should offer to meet the needs of the residents they are charged with caring for. Every other hospital system in San Diego County seems to recognize this obligation except Tri-City. We have worked closely and successfully with other hospitals who are shouldering an increased share of the load, which makes it even more difficult to understand Tri City's reticence to accept assistance in bringing these much-needed services back online.

Again, we request that you submit your comprehensive plan to the County's Director of Behavioral Health, Dr. Luke Bergmann, within 30 days of this correspondence. You can email the plan to [Luke.Bergmann@sdcounty](mailto:Luke.Bergmann@sdcounty) and/or mail to 1600 Pacific Highway, MS: P-501, San Diego, CA 92101.

We prefer an environment of collaboration and cooperation to address the regional behavioral health needs, but continued failure to show substantive progress and a concrete plan will leave us no choice. We eagerly await your response and remain hopeful that legislative action will not be required.

Sincerely,



NATHAN FLETCHER  
County Supervisor  
Fourth District



TASHA BOERNER HORVATH  
California State Assemblymember  
76<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

Steve Dietlin  
June 10, 2019  
Page 3

CC: Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon  
Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins  
Dimitrios Alexiou, CEO, Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties  
Leigh Anne Grass, Tri-City Medical Center Board of Directors  
Larry W. Shallock, Tri-City Medical Center Board of Directors  
Julie Nygaard, Tri-City Medical Center Board of Directors  
Rose Marie V. Reno, Tri-City Medical Center Board of Directors  
Rocky J. Chavez, Tri-City Medical Center Board of Directors  
George W. Coulter, Tri-City Medical Center Board of Directors  
Tracy M. Younger, Tri-City Medical Center Board of Directors