



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Behavioral Health and Service Integration Administration
PO Box 45050, Olympia, WA 98504-5050

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Greg Devereux, Executive Director
Washington Federation of State Employees
1212 Jefferson Street SE, Suite 300
Olympia, WA 98501

Diane Sosne, RN, MN, President
Service Employees International Union Healthcare 1199NW
15 South Grady Way, Suite 200
Renton, WA 98057

David Ward, President
Affiliated Washington Pharmacists
By Employer Email

Vasant Halarnakar, President
Union of Physicians of Washington
By Employer Email

Dear Labor Partners:

The safety of patients and staff at the State hospitals as well as the effective stewardship of resources, are central to our strategic plan and our mission to transform lives. As you are aware, overtime expenses at the state hospitals have far exceeded our operating budget. Recently, DSHS was directed by the Legislature to curb our overtime expenses at state hospitals. While the legislature appropriated funding to address state fiscal year 2014 overtime expenditures, no additional funds were provided for overtime expenses for FY2015. We are therefore taking a number of aggressive steps to rapidly reduce overtime expenses.

Attached you will find formal mandatory subject notices for steps that may impact your respective Unions. I am providing you with this cover letter to provide background information about BHSIA's overall approach to improving patient and staff safety while carefully reducing overtime expenses at the state hospitals.

1. **Float Pools** State hospitals will use float pools to cover for planned and unplanned absences. Fifteen additional MHT and PSA positions have been established at Western State Hospital (WSH) to form a permanent float pool for deployment where daily

coverage is most needed. Floats deployed in conjunction with on call staff, and nonpermanent employees would provide coverage at the straight time rate to lessen the need for overtime while increasing safety for patients and staff.

2. **On Call Staff** The hospitals will maximize the use of on call staff for coverage of scheduled and unscheduled leave. On Call Staff paid at the straight time rate will be used prior to using overtime. To help cover absences over the summer months, WSH will be adding approximately 35 on call positions.
3. **Additional Hiring Resources** Eastern State Hospital (ESH) will use additional staff to maximize the hospital's ability to hire and onboard new staff to the floor as quickly as possible.
4. **Increase Nursing Care Positions** State hospitals will evaluate non-direct care positions for possible reallocation as direct care positions to increase staff available for nursing care where needed. At WSH, ten Food Service Workers are being reallocated to Mental Health Technicians (MHTs) to provide additional support and care during the afternoons, evening meals, and evening hours. The new MHTs will be assigned to work a new swing shift, 12:45 p.m. to 9 p.m. The new MHTs will be present on the wards during the hours between the end of daily treatment and typical bed time for most patients. In addition, the new MHTs will provide increased safety for patients and staff.
5. **Compensatory Time** BHSIA will temporarily suspend the ability of overtime eligible employees to accrue compensatory time instead of receiving cash payments for overtime from June 30, 2014 through June 30, 2015. The permissive language in our collective bargaining agreements and the Employer Policy allows us the option to pay for overtime instead of granting compensatory time. As you may be aware, employees using compensatory time for a day off may create the need for overtime to fill behind them. Reducing compensatory time off is expected to promote more employees being at work more of the time and create a safer work environment. Employees would continue to use accumulated compensatory time until the cash out period occurs. This compensatory time plan was successfully implemented at ESH earlier this year.
6. **Overtime Distribution** WSH will discuss bargain changes to update its overtime distribution methods to ensure that the methods promote efficient and cost-effective distribution of overtime. The areas of interest are deployment of classifications, periods of overtime hours, methods of selection, and qualifications to be eligible to work overtime.
7. **Scheduling Manager** ESH and WSH will each establish and utilize a Schedule Manager position to ensure that staffing resources are consistent with department long-term and

short-term staffing needs using established department staffing plans. The position will establish a central point for all leave approvals, institute monitoring systems and oversee compliance with and adherence to the attendance policy. The Scheduling Manager also will be responsible for provision of regular reports to discipline leaders and administration as requested.

8. **Attendance Policy** BHSIA will implement a new policy tool for supervisors to use in communicating and enforcing attendance expectations. The proposed policy sets clear expectations for employee attendance, and clarifies responsibilities for employees and supervisors.
9. **Staffing Patterns** State hospitals, in conjunction with their Nurse Staffing Committees, are also reevaluating staffing to assure adequate coverage on weekends and holidays.

In addition to being necessary to reduce overtime, these steps are also consistent with feedback from the 2013 employee survey which expressed the desire for increased safety, increased staffing, accountability for attendance, and a strong desire to meet the needs of our patients.

I trust that these actions, paired with the continuing work of the Ad Hoc Safety and Joint Nurse Staffing committees, will bring us through FY 2015 creating safer places for our staff to work and for our patients to receive vital treatment essential to recovery. I look forward to working with each of you as we move toward changes that could lessen the impact on the critical services provided by state hospitals. If you have questions or I can assist you otherwise, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Victoria Roberts
Deputy Assistant Secretary

cc: Jane Beyer, Assistant Secretary, Behavioral Health and Service Integration Administration, DSHS
Dorothy Sawyer, Chief Executive Officer, Eastern State Hospital, DSHS
Ron Adler, Chief Executive Officer, Eastern State Hospital, DSHS
Rick Mehlman, Chief Executive Officer, Child Study & Treatment Center, DSHS
Dave Stewart, Senior Director, Human Resources, DSHS
Laura Wulf, Assistant Human Resources Director, Human Resources, DSHS
Lori Manning, Human Resources Administrator, Human Resources, DSHS
Randy Withrow, Human Resources Administrator, Human Resources, DSHS
John Myer, Labor Relations Specialist, Human Resources, DSHS
Rhonda Fenrich, AWP Representative