



Working for Justice Since 1967

columbialegal.org

August 28, 2017

Mr. Dennis Carver
President, Board of Commissioners
Klickitat Valley Hospital
310 S Roosevelt
Goldendale, WA 98620

Dear Mr. Carver:

We write today to express serious concerns about Klickitat Valley Hospital's (KVH) abdication of its legal responsibility to ensure that limited English proficient community members and patients have equal and fair access to pertinent information regarding hospital services and financial assistance.

Columbia Legal Services, a non-profit public interest law firm, retained an independent entity, the Equal Rights Center, to conduct a survey of the availability of financial assistance to Spanish-language speakers in hospitals throughout Washington State. ERC used paired civil rights testers, both English- and Spanish-speaking, to measure differences in the information they received from a sample of twenty hospitals, including KVH. The testing was conducted by phone and website research.

In KVH's case, the testers reported being told by the operator/receptionist that the hospital only provides translation services when the patient is examined by a doctor and does not provide such assistance with charity care since the application requires sensitive, confidential information (such as address and social security number). Perhaps most troubling, during another call, the operator/receptionist did not offer to transfer the caller to an interpreter or even a bilingual staff member employee. Instead, the operator/receptionist asked if the tester was speaking Spanish, then hung up when the question about access to care was repeated in Spanish.

While KVH has updated its Charity Care policy on the Department of Health's website, the *hospital's website* still contains very little information regarding Charity Care. Although the hospital does make available a document titled "Help for your billing questions," it merely directs consumers to Patient Financial Services and does not inform patients of their rights, the availability of Charity Care by name, or Charity Care financial guidelines. The pamphlet fails to make clear that patients may be entitled to a 100 percent discount based on their financial circumstances.

We were unable to access a Charity Care application (in English or in Spanish) through KVH's website. If



Basic Human Needs Project • Children and Youth Project • Economic Justice Project • Institutions Project • Working Families Project

Kennewick
7103 W Clearwater Ave, Ste C
Kennewick, WA 99336
(888) 201-9735

Olympia
711 Capitol Way S, Suite 304
Olympia, WA 98501
(800) 260-6260

Seattle
101 Yesler Way, Suite 300
Seattle, WA 98104
(800) 542-0794

Wenatchee
300 Okanogan Ave, Suite 2A
Wenatchee, WA 98801
(800) 572-9615

Yakima
600 Larson Building
6 South Second Street
Yakima, WA 98901
(800) 631-1323

KVH's Charity Care application does require a Social Security Number, this requirement should be deleted or made optional. Requiring an SSN places a chilling effect upon applications and rejecting an application for this reason is a violation of state law. We urge you to make additional information regarding Charity Care readily available on your website, including language-appropriate applications.

Please respond within 30 days regarding these issues and describe steps that will be taken to ensure that community members and patients will receive equal access to Charity Care and other services.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'D. Ty Duhamel' followed by a long horizontal line.

D. Ty Duhamel, Attorney
Tony Gonzalez, Attorney