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August 28, 2017

Ms. Elain Couture
Chief Executive
Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center & Children's Hospital
Providence Health Care, Eastern Washington/Montana Region
101 W 8th Ave.
Spokane, WA 99204

Dear Ms. Couture:

We write today to express serious concerns about your Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center's (PSH) abdication of its legal responsibility to ensure that limited English proficient community members and patients have equal 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 comprehensive survey of the availability of financial assistance to Spanish-language speakers in hospitals throughout Washington State. ERC used paired civil rights testers to pose as prospective patients, both English- and Spanish-speaking, to measure differences in the information they received from a sample of twenty hospitals, including PSH. The testing was conducted by phone and website research.

In PSH's case, the testers reported that the operators in both the reception and billing departments spoke English only and failed to transfer the caller to a bilingual staff member. Perhaps most troubling, Spanish-language testers were disconnected without explanation, leaving them without the assistance they were requesting. This conduct violates both federal and state law, and prevents persons in greatest need from obtaining critical information regarding health care.

In addition, we were frankly confused to read that the Providence website tells patients they can apply "before receiving medical treatment" or "at any time while receiving treatment" but cannot apply for Charity Care "during the billing process." This runs contrary to your written policies and WAC 246-453-020 which states that hospitals shall make Charity Care designations "at any time." The website language effectively places Providence among the most restrictive in the state in terms of application period and deadline.



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We urge you to immediately review your policies and practices and website, and take all steps to remedy these deficiencies without delay. Systemic denial of service to non-English proficient patients could constitute a deceptive act in violation of the Washington Consumer Protection Act.

Please respond within 30 days regarding this issue and describe steps that will be taken to ensure that non-English proficient patients will receive equal access to Charity Care and other services.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Ty Duhamel" followed by a horizontal line and a circled "D".

D. Ty Duhamel, Attorney
Tony Gonzalez, Attorney