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August 28, 2017

Mr. Timothy Courner, Chief Executive Officer
Forks Community Hospital
530 Bogachiel Way
Forks, WA 98331

Dear Mr. Courner:

We write today to express serious concerns about Forks Community Hospital's (FCH) 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 FCH. The testing was conducted by phone and website research.

In FCH's case, the testers reported that the operator/receptionist spoke English only and did not offer to transfer the caller to an interpreter or even a bilingual staff member. Perhaps most troubling, Spanish-language testers were hung up on repeatedly and did not receive assistance regarding Charity Care and financial assistance. We also understand that Spanish interpreters are not always available at FCH to provide assistance regarding Charity Care and that there are hours when such assistance is available only in English.

This conduct violates both federal and state law, and prevents persons in greatest need from obtaining critical information regarding health care. We urge you to immediately review your policies and practices 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,

[Handwritten signature]

D. Ty Duhamel, Attorney
Tony Gonzalez, Attorney



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