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Mayor and Council
1100 Patricia Boulevard
Prince George, BC V2L 3V9

Dear Mayor and Council:

Re: Petition for a Psychiatric Hospital in Northern BC

I am writing on behalf of the Spirit Table of Prince George and myself. The Spirit Table (Safety Priority Immediate Response Initiative Team) comprises over 23 community agencies that meet weekly to collaborate with each other in addressing ongoing community safety issues and to increase interagency collaboration, among other things. I am a psychiatrist and have been practicing in Prince George since 1990.

We are writing to inform you about a petition that is circulating in Prince George and northern BC. The petition arose out of concern for the many people who have needs far beyond the capacity of either our hospitals in northern BC or the many community agencies in Prince George and the north.

The abbreviated history regarding the need for a psychiatric hospital began when the only psychiatric hospital in BC, Riverview Hospital in Port Coquitlam, closed in 2012. There were clear indications even before Riverview closed that the community services could not manage the people who needed long-term secure psychiatric care. Homelessness and street crime were starting to escalate even before Riverview closed, as outlined in the Vancouver Police Department report 'Lost in Transition'. That 2008 report recommended that there be a mental health facility that could care for people with chronic and persistent mental illness, four years before Riverview closed!

Since then, governments have added community supports but they are not able to compensate for the services of a psychiatric hospital. As a result, communities have been left 'holding the bag' for services they cannot provide such as long-term secure psychiatric care.

Institutions such as correctional facilities and general hospitals are affected as people are transinstitutionalized due to the lack of appropriate psychiatric facilities.

Many people have come to the conclusion that a psychiatric hospital is an essential component of the health care system. No amount of community services will be able to overcome the issues of severely mentally ill people on the street without treatment, their unfortunate descent into drug use and the resultant homelessness as they become unable to sustain any kind of housing.

This petition asks for the provincial government to work with Northern Health to develop a psychiatric hospital in northern BC. This is not the only thing that needs to be done to rectify the many problems this community and others are facing, but without that level of service, all community services and general hospitals will be overwhelmed by the needs of these people.

We would like to see this letter included on the agenda for the Aug. 19, 2024 Council meeting. We are asking for your support in encouraging people to sign the petition.

Sincerely,

Barbara J. Kane
Clinical Psychiatrist

Things to Know about the Petition

This is information about petitions from the government of BC website which people need to know if they are going to help with the petition:

- Petitioners must be residents of the Province of British Columbia and provide their name and address.
- There is no minimum age requirement for anyone signing a petition.

Petitions presented in original, hard-copy form must comply with the following basic rules:

- All signatures must be original and written directly on the face of the petition, and not pasted or transferred to it. Petitions must be free of erasures or insertions. The petition must be in original form; not a photocopy or printed scan.
- If a petition consists of more than one sheet of signatures, the text of the petition must appear at the top of each sheet.
- Each person petitioning the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia must print their name and address and sign their name under the text of the petition.
- Petitions must be written, typewritten or printed, and it is recommended that the paper be standard letter or legal size.

Petitions can be handed in at Dr. Kane's office, Suite 101-1268 5th Ave before Aug. 6 or 825 Vancouver St. after Aug. 6 or the Justice Council 511 George Street. Petitions can also be signed at Dr. Kane's office or the Justice Council. Call ahead to make sure someone is there: Dr. Kane's office 250-564-1152; Justice Council contact is Cheryl Johnson 778-763-4316.

We will be collecting petitions and signatures until Oct. 1, 2024.

Thanks for all your help.

