

# PRESS RELEASE



Snohomish County

County Council

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## **Triage Facility to Open in Everett**

*New tool for evaluating mentally ill detainees*

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On Friday, Governor Chris Gregoire signed a bill authorizing triage facilities as a cost-effective alternative to jails and emergency rooms for the evaluation of mentally ill individuals who have been arrested for non-felony crimes. The bill was championed by the Snohomish County Council as a way to reduce costs while ensuring that persons exhibiting signs of mental illness are placed in the appropriate facility immediately while a suitable course of action is determined.

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Previously under state law, persons who had been arrested for non-felony crimes could only be held involuntarily in jails or hospital emergency rooms. Triage facilities could evaluate these persons, but individuals could not be held involuntarily. The new law allows for persons to be held involuntarily at a triage center for a maximum of 12 hours while they are stabilized and assessed for needed treatment.

“This is a win-win for law enforcement, county taxpayers, and for the mentally ill in Snohomish County” said Council Chair Dave Somers. “Now these individuals can be housed temporarily at a facility that offers medical expertise and treatment that is not available in jails, and at a significantly lower cost than hospital emergency rooms.”

The creation of a triage center was one of the catalysts behind the County Council’s 2008 adoption of a sales tax for chemical dependency and mental health issues. “An estimated 11% of jail inmates have serious mental health

issues, and another 74% have chemical dependency issues,” noted Councilmember Dave Gossett. “Finding a way to evaluate and process these individuals in an appropriate and cost-effective facility is just common sense.”

The triage facility will be operated in partnership with the North Sound Mental Health Administration and Compass Health. A 90-day trial phase began at the facility in early March with the assistance of the Everett and Snohomish Police Departments to identify and correct any issues before it will begin accepting detainees from all county law enforcement agencies.

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