

The Committee on Ways and Means met on Thursday, October 3, 2024 at 6:00pm in the City Council Chambers at City Hall.

The meeting was recorded by ECTV and can be viewed on the City of Everett website.

Members present were Councilor Anthony DiPierro, presiding; Councilors Guerline Alcy Jabouin and Holly Garcia. Member absent was Councilor Stephanie Smith due to being away on vacation with her family.

The Committee met on an Order offered by Councilor Robert Van Campen, as President: An Order to raise and appropriate \$300,000.00 to the Health Department's Professional Services account. The Health Department is requesting these funds to hire an outside staffing company to address school nurse staffing issues until the open vacancies have been filled.

Chief Financial Officer Eric Demas, Mayors Chief of Staff Erin Deveney, Health Director Sabrina Firicano and Public Health Manager Krista Costello was also present.

Councilor Smith who had announced that she would not be present at this meeting sent the Health Department a list of questions related to the school nursing staffing issue and responses to these questions were provided by Ms. Firicano and Ms. Costello which have been attached for the record. Councilor Smith also sent a communication to the Committee members and invited guests (also attached) which outlined her concerns with paying a contractor a lot more money than what the school nurses were receiving was not acceptable to her. She noted that it was not sustainable from a budgetary and personnel standpoint. She noted in a further comment that she was against spending more money on the contracted Cataldo nurses and not investing in our own City nurses. Councilor Alcy-Jabouin asked what would happen if the City Council did not fund the \$300,000 appropriation and asked further if this would result in a need to shut down a school? Ms. Firicano responded that the appropriation was needed bring in the contract nurses needed and that closing a building was a last resort. Councilor Alcy-Jabouin asked how many months does the \$300,000 cover to and Ms. Firicano responded that they projected that the funds would cover to the first of the year. Councilor Alcy-Jabouin inquired if the \$150,000 budgeted for Professional Services for FY25 was already spent and Ms. Firicano stated that it was spent. Councilor Alcy-Jabouin expressed concern on paying a contract for nurses at \$95 an hour when the City School nurses were only making approximately \$45 an hour. Ms. Firicano explained that the Contractor Cataldo was getting the \$95 but the actual nurses Cataldo was providing were getting \$40 an hour. Ms. Firicano explained that the City was working on a need to cover the shortage of nurses until the City can hire the nurses. Councilor Garcia asked if the city was actively recruiting and Ms. Firicano assured the Committee that the City was actively recruiting school nurses and once they go through a 4 week orientation the City would cut back on the contracted nurses. Councilor Garcia asked if the pay was similar to other school districts and Ms. Firicano stated that it was. She noted that the new hires would be getting \$37.72 an hour which was at \$32.40 on the last contract with City nurses. Councilor Alcy-Jabouin asked if this is the only agency the City is working with and Ms. Firicano explained that others can't support the city needs and others were at a higher price. The Committee members concurred that it made more sense to pay City nurses than paying an agency at a higher cost and hoped that the hiring process could be expedited.

The Committee voted: to report back to the City Council with No Recommendation.

Respectfully Submitted,

John W. Burley
Clerk of Committees

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Health Department response from Director Sabrina Firicano and Krista Costello to Councilor Stephanie Smith's questions related to the appropriation of \$300,000 to address school nursing staffing issues

1. Is the outside staffing company helping us to get permanent or more temporary nurses?
 - The staffing company we currently use, Cataldo, does not recruit for us but we are currently working with human resources into other options and agencies ie. temp-permanent.
2. What are we paying the staffing company to actually do?
 - The staffing company is providing us with at least 5 nurses per day to cover and assist our current nurses in the school buildings.
3. What makes up the \$300K? *Cataldo charges*. Seems like a lot of money.
 - Cataldo charges \$95/hour and we are currently utilizing at least 5 nurses per day from Cataldo. This does not factor in if there is a sick call.
4. Why are you asking for additional money when we have money in the salary account since we only have 9 nurses? Can we just transfer it from salary?
 - We currently only have 8 nurses. We are working with Human Resources to recruit more nurses. We are hoping to be able to fill the salary positions.
5. Do we need to hire RNs? If yes, is it possible to hire an LPN with pediatric experience? Is there some type of waiver that we can give out since we are in such dire need and pair an LPN with an RN? Is it possible to hire a CNA to help with paperwork or initial intake only?
 - Yes, LPNs unfortunately cannot administer medication independently. Our immediate need is RNs. RNs are able to cover building independently and cover sick calls or scheduled days off.
6. What is the average waiting time for a child to see a nurse? Have heard from parents there are sometimes upwards of 5 children waiting to be seen.
 - Nurses prioritize as soon as a large group comes into the nurse's office. Large groups of students usually tend to come in the nurse's office during recess/lunch. Wait time is always less than 5 mins.
7. Is there a daily log of visits to nurse? If so, can you provide by school for the number of visits per day/week/year, etc. (just #, don't need any additional info on the who, why, etc.)?
 - Yes, we document all visits in Aspen/X2. Every building is different: Preschools 5-10, Middle schools 30-80. HS 100 or more. We have reached out to the school department to run a report on the exact number of visits per school.
8. How many nurses do we have per school? *HS: 2, Keverian: 2, Lafayette: 2, Parlin: 2, Madeline English: 1, Whittier: 1, Webster: 1, Webster Ex.: 1, Adams: 1*
9. Why do we only have 1 nurse at the Maddie?
 - There are less than 1000 students in the building requiring it to have one nurse. If we are able to get to fully staffed there will be a second nurse placed there.
10. Why do we not have 3 at high school with 2,000 kids?
 - If we had enough nurses there would be 3 at the HS.

11. Would think with majority of kids with ESL that we would need even more additional nurses than State Law (which was from 1998) because it takes longer to communicate.
 - Due to the number of students in each building it would be beneficial to have more nurses and if we had more staff we would provide more nurses to the buildings.
12. Nurses contract – when was it last negotiated? It was last negotiated last year.
13. The exit interviews – why are nurses leaving? Two have left since last school year.
 - Exit interview are being done through Human Resources. We unfortunately lost 3 nurses to the school department in the last two school years, and another nurse to work inpatient 3 12 hr shifts.
14. I have heard that the current and former nurses are just burnt out and are upset about continuing to pay more and more to Cataldo but are not doing anything to better our actual nurses that are there day in and day out. That they can't even take a sick or personal time without totally affecting the entire district schedule because we no longer have floaters.
 - We have some strong Cataldo nurses that have been in our school buildings covering for over a year. They have covered sick days, personal days, summer hours, during February/April vacations. The nurses are able to take sick days, we have not denied any sick time. There has been a total of 8 sick days used among the nurses since the beginning of this school year.
15. Are other cities in the same position as us with having a hard time hiring nurses? Is it because we are so close to Boston and also our diverse population and we need our pay and benefits to be more competitive?
 - We have not heard of other school districts having a hard time hiring nurses.
16. Cataldo nurses – how much are they being paid and is it more than the actual school nurse per hour?
 - The city pays \$95 an hour to Cataldo. The nurse at Cataldo has a starting pay at \$40/hr.
17. Per Diem nurses - how much are they being paid and is it more than the actual school nurse per hour?
 - \$35 an hour. This was just increased as of July 1st from \$30/hr to \$35/hour
18. Are the Cataldo nurses/Per Diem on a rotating basis or is it the same person at the same school for a predetermined time?
 - We have been trying to keep the nurses in the same buildings for consistency. We currently have 15 nurses from Cataldo that have been consistent and rotate to the buildings.
19. Medically complex children – are these being handled by the school nurse or the Cataldo nurse/Per Diem or it depends on who is available at the time?
 - They are handled by what nurse is available. Most nurses are being kept in the same building so they have a relationship with the students.
20. Parents concerned about the rotating schedule and not knowing that there are serious allergies, etc.
 - We have not received any concerns from any parents, also all students with medical condition or allergies have alert in Aspen X2 that can be viewed by the nurse.

21. Paperwork – is everything up-to-date for the school year and input into the system for each school for physicals, medications, allergies and all paperwork that is needed? If it is not up to date, when is the estimated date? Who is inputting? Is it the permanent or temporary or a mix of both?
 - Paperwork is done continuously throughout the school. This is done by the main nurse and also the Cataldo nurse. The main focus in the beginning of the school year to identify students with allergies and medical conditions. All schools currently have an up-to-date Medical Alert List.
22. Field trip coverage: What are we doing if we don't even have enough nurses to be at the school? Do the schools need to cancel field trips because of the shortage?
 - We have put all field trips on hold since our priority is covering the school buildings. We had a meeting with the superintendent to make him aware of the nursing shortage and the need to hold field trips at the moment.
23. Elementary school nurses – Actual feedback I received: parents and students are concerned about the rotating nurses.
 - There is a head nurse in every building that is consistent. We have not received any complaints from parents regarding Cataldo nurses. If parents do have complaints or concerns, they should be reaching out to myself or Krista so that we can address the concerns.
24. Kids are not comfortable going to the nurse because personnel changes frequently from day to day and they don't know the nurse they are seeing.
 - There is a head nurse in every building that is consistent and is a City Nurse.
25. A lot of these younger kids get comfort in going to the nurse and don't feel that with the changing nurses, especially with language barrier.
 - There is a main nurse in every school building. The nurses also have access to interpreters in the school, access to LionBridge, and access to a hand-held translator to assist with any language barriers.
26. Some of the rotating nurses, the parents feel are harsh and are not accommodating to the children and are just there to collect their paycheck.
 - We have not received any negative feedback on "rotating nurses". Again, parents should be reaching out to myself and Krista so that we can address these issues. If we do not know these issues are occurring, we are unable to address them. In the past if there was an issue with a rotating nurse, we have notified Cataldo and that nurse is no longer put on the schedule.
27. Was there a recent incident that happened that changed the medication holding period? Or did policy change? It used to be one month and it is now 10 days/2 weeks. Parents have raised that it is more of a pain now to bring it so often and are wondering why the sudden change.
 - We have had a few different issues that has caused a change in our medication policy. We can take a two-week supply at this time (10 days).

Councilor Stephanie Smith comments related to the appropriation of \$300,000 before the 10/3/24 Ways and Means Committee on School nursing staffing issue

I unfortunately will not be at the meeting because I am on vacation but would be a strong proponent of the City going into impact bargaining with the current nurses. Paying Cataldo \$95/hour while only paying our school nurses much lower (I think it is \$45/hr) is not acceptable. It's been a few years now that we have had to utilize Cataldo on an ongoing basis. It's not sustainable from a budgetary and personnel standpoint. I think if we could go up on our salary that we would get more permanent nurses to apply and keep the ones that we currently have.

Having a nurse see between 30-80 elementary kids a day is mind-blowing. That means during school hours, a nurse is seeing a student every 5-10 minutes for the entire school day. When do they have time to do paperwork? When do they have time for lunch? I know most nurses are working through their breaks. That is more than some doctor's offices see a day.

As we are so short-staffed and can't seem to hire RNs, can we hire LPNs at a lower salary to help with the intake process and see the kids and just not administer medication? Since most schools are requiring two nurses and I find it highly unlikely that the nurses are having to administer medication at the same time. I know there are some LPNs that are interested in positions in Everett if we were to offer and this would help to lower the costs by not having to pay Cataldo as well as keep the nurses consistent. I'm trying to think outside the box here to come up with a plan for the long-term.

In terms of consistency, from what I have heard, there are not consistent Cataldo nurses daily. Maybe Monday every week there is the same nurse but Tuesday is different, Wednesday is different, etc. So depending on the day, a young student doesn't know who he/she will see in nurses office from a Cataldo nurse. I get that the same City nurse is in the building but if the nurses are so busy, they don't see the same children every time. Also, it makes the workload even harder on the City nurses because the Cataldo nurses may not know who is a recurring student coming into the nurse, vs someone who has never been seen, someone who only comes when it is really critical, etc. And yes, I know you can look this up in computer .. but having the personal relationships is HUGE for kids (which the City nurses do have as most have been at the City for years now).

Also, you may have not heard the concerns from the parents, but as a City Councilor and active in the community, I hear from parents and kids on almost on a weekly basis. Just last week, I had 5 different parents and had 3 nurses reach out to me regarding the shortage and concerns. Hence why I reached out and expressed their concerns to you via the email I sent. Even if you are not hearing from the parents, I am. The City is making do for now with what we have by piecing together a nursing strategy but again, not sustainable nor ideal. And, it doesn't seem like it is getting any better as another nurse has even put in their notice since the first email I sent. When I get back I will be happy to sit down with you and Krista about the concerns I am getting from both sides in more detail.

Cheers,
Stephanie