

WHATCOM COUNTY  
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE  
311 Grand Avenue, Suite 108  
Bellingham, WA 98225



**Satpal Singh Sidhu**  
County Executive

October 10, 2023

Public Disclosure Commission  
c/o Jennifer Hansen, Compliance Officer PO Box 40908  
Olympia, WA 98504-0908  
pdc@pdc.wa.gov

RE: Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu Response to PDC Complaint No. 14291

Dear Ms. Hansen:

Please accept the following response to PDC Complaint Number 14291 emailed to me on October 4, 2023. The complaint was filed electronically with the PDC by Dena Jensen on September 25, 2023.

The complaint alleges that I violated RCW 42.17.555 by supporting a ballot proposition during a public meeting of our county's Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force (IPRTF) Steering Committee. The ballot measure in question relates to the funding of a proposed justice facility and related programming. Specifically, Ms. Jensen asserts that I, acting as the Executive for Whatcom County and a member of the IPRTF, responded to a direct question from another task force member related this ballot measure during this meeting. Ms. Jensen alleges that by doing so I improperly promoted a ballot proposition using public facilities.

I do not dispute Ms. Jensen's claim that I answered a question referencing the ballot proposition during a public meeting of the IPRTF. This question was posed by a fellow task force member during our meeting held on September 18, 2023. However, my response to this specific question during the meeting as cited in the complaint does not amount to a violation of RCW 42.17A.555. There are two alternative reasons the PDC should agree with this conclusion.

First, my answer to the question as quoted in the complaint was not made for the purposes of promoting the ballot proposition being discussed. While the response may be characterized as supportive in nature, it was made for purposes of addressing the questioner's concerns about program funding if the ballot proposition does not pass. These concerns were directly related to the work of the IPRTF on that day and the question posed. With this in mind the PDC should consider the context and nature of my statements, including the business being conducted and my role that day as a member of the IPRTF at the time, and conclude the statements were not made for purposes of promoting the ballot proposition to the public.

Alternatively, should the PDC disagree and conclude that my statements on September 18, 2023, were made for purposes of promoting the ballot proposition, it should conclude that I answered the specific question in my role as the Whatcom County Executive and member of the IPRTF. In the transcript, as provided by the complainant, it is clear that my comments were immediately preceded by an inquiry related to the likelihood of the ballot measure's passage

and potential contingencies based on the outcome of the election. As an elected official my response to this specific inquiry reflected my position on the ballot proposition, which is allowable under RCW 42.17A.555. Therefore, the prohibitions of RCW 42.17A.555 would not apply to my statements.

In conclusion, I respectfully ask that the PDC find that I did not improperly promote a ballot proposition during the meeting of the IPRFT on September 18, 2023, as alleged in PDC Complaint No. 14291. Further, I request the matter be closed and no further action taken.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Satpal Sidhu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Satpal Sidhu  
County Executive