



TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Council Member Catherine Ushka
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: **Resolution - Expressing City Council opposition to Pierce County Council Ordinance No. 2020-136 – December 8, 2020**
DATE: 12/8/2020

SUMMARY & PURPOSE:

A resolution expressing City Council opposition to Pierce County Council Ordinance No. 2020-136, which establishes a County Board of Health and Department of Public Health and terminates the Agreement Creating a Combined County-City Health Department Known as the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, and inviting a cooperative discussion, after the current pandemic has passed, on whether dissolution of the current structure is in the best interests of the City and Pierce County residents.

[Council Member Catherine Ushka]

COUNCIL SPONSORS:

Mayor Victoria Woodards, Deputy Mayor Blocker, and Council Member Catherine Ushka

BACKGROUND:

This Council Member’s Recommendation is Based On:

For nearly 50 years, the City of Tacoma and Pierce County have operated a combined County-City Health Department, known as the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (“TPCHD”), pursuant to Chapters 70.05, 70.08, and 70.12 of the Revised Code of Washington. If Pierce County Council (“PCC”) proposed Ordinance No. 2020-136 (introduced on December 1, 2020 and considered on initial reading by the PCC on the same date) is approved, the PCC would terminate the interlocal agreement between the City and Pierce County, effectively eliminating the TPCHD as it operates today. Proposed PCC Ordinance No. 2020-136 would also create a new Health Department as part of Pierce County government, dissolve the current public health board and install the County Council members to perform the function of the public health board.

The City of Tacoma was not consulted on the termination of the nearly 50-year agreement between the City and County, and none of the cities and towns in Pierce County, TPCHD, nor the medical community were consulted as stakeholders on this matter. The expedited timeline by which the PCC is considering this legislation does not allow for meaningful input from the public and community stakeholders. The proposed ordinance does not contain any fiscal analysis, as required under Pierce County Code Section 1.28.075, so the impact to the City of Tacoma, which contributes over \$1 million dollars to the TPCHD’s and the County’s budget, cannot be fully contemplated under this proposal. This resolution would:

- Affirm the City of Tacoma’s commitment to the health of people throughout Pierce County;
- Invite the Pierce County Council to engage in meaningful dialogue to improve services at a later date
- Express the Mayor and City Council’s opposition to Pierce County Council Ordinance No. 2020-136;
- Direct the City Manager to forward a copy of this resolution to the Pierce County Council; and
- Urge the Pierce County Council to reconsider the timeline for consideration of this legislation, thereby avoiding undue chaos and uncertainty for Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department staff and the community at large.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Council Members have received an extraordinary amount of messages from constituents opposed to the Pierce County Council making significant changes to the health department on such a rapid timeline. Many have asked for the Council to make a statement opposed to the County ordinance. The Mayor and CM Ushka attended the Pierce County Council Rules meeting on Monday, December 7. In the hour of testimony permitted, every speaker was opposed to this ordinance. The Pierce County Council also received over 600 pages of written comments from the community almost exclusively in opposition to the passage of this ordinance.

2025 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Equity and Accessibility:

The Pierce County Council proposal is already eroding public trust in public health during this pandemic that will make people more resistant to following instructions or collaborating with contact tracing, resulting in fuller hospitals, medical personnel more at risk and more lives lost. We know that minority communities are disproportionately impacted by this disease. This disproportionate representation is seen in essential work settings such as healthcare facilities, farms, factories, grocery stores, and public transportation. Some people who work in these settings have more chances to be exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 due to several factors, such as close contact with the public or other workers, not being able to work from home, and not having paid sick days. The health and safety of our entire community is dependent on everyone doing their part to control the spread of this disease.

Livability: Equity Index Score: Moderate Opportunity

Improve health outcomes and reduce disparities, in alignment with the community health needs assessment and CHIP, for all Tacoma residents

Increase positive public perception of safety and overall quality of life.

This resolution calls on the Pierce County Council to postpone consideration of changing the structure of the local health department until after local impacts of the global pandemic are under control, so that our health department staff, the medical community, and the public can keep their focus on managing the pandemic at this critical moment.

ALTERNATIVES:

Alternative	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
1. Make no statement	No positive impacts	Lack of clear signal from the Council about the future of our public health department
2. Support to Pierce County Council Ordinance No. 2020-136	No positive impacts	Further erode trust in public health system and disrupt public health work during the COVID-19 pandemic



City of Tacoma

City Council Action Memorandum

EVALUATIONS AND FOLLOW UP:

A lack of discussion and analysis on this issue has provided no clear metrics on performance going forward or how it will be measured. This includes fiscal impacts to both the Pierce County and the City of Tacoma, which are undetermined. City staff should monitor the Pierce County Council's decisions in regard to this ordinance and the fiscal impacts their choice will have on the City of Tacoma budget. The City should also continue to engage the Pierce County Council and Executive to discuss options for maintaining regional public health.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECOMMENDATION:

The sponsors' recommendation is to pass this resolution expressing City Council opposition to Pierce County Council Ordinance No. 2020-136.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No fiscal impact.