

Dear Mayor Woodward and City Councilmembers,

Tacoma Tenants Organizing Committee (TTOC) and Tacoma Democratic Socialists of America (TDSA) are currently concerned about the potential detrimental impact of City Ordinance 28615, especially code change 8.27.210: “No Structures in park; exceptions,” if passed as is. We are writing in response to urge the Council to step up and make solutions, rather than bans, to solve the homelessness crisis.

We believe that in order to create long-lasting, positive change to solving homelessness the voices of those being directly impacted now and in the past need to have their voices a part of the conversation. In other words, both TTOC and TDSA believe that folks experiencing homelessness should have a seat at the table when making this huge decision.

It is concerning to us that Metro Parks did not reach out to direct service providers, but even more so, people experiencing homelessness for input around a code change that involves their daily lives.

When hearing this during the 1st Reading on Sept. 24th, members of TDSA’s Housing Working Group decided to begin the process of this necessary work. These members interviewed folks experiencing homelessness or had recently become housing-stable within the last year. We have attached excerpts of those interviews to this letter. All of the names have been redacted. Each person desired to share their story and comment directly to you now and have their voices echoed during our Public Comments on October 1st, 2019.

The questions that we asked were:

- What do you think were the reasons that led you to fall into homelessness?
- What has been your experience been like experiencing homelessness in the City of Tacoma? (Additional follow-up questions: Is there enough shelter? What would you like to share with the council about what the experience has been like?)
- The City Council is about to pass a code change against urban camping in public parks. How do you feel about that?
- How do you think that the City is treating you and others experiencing homelessness?
- If you could ask the City government for one solution to solve the homelessness crisis, what would it be? In other words, what solutions do you want to see?
- How would you and others be directly impacted by this? What would it change for you?
- Lastly, is there anything that you would like to share with the City Council?

From our short conversations, striking patterns arose around calling for help and echoing the ever-apparent need for more shelter **now**. Not only just shelter beds like Nativity House and the

Tacoma Rescue Mission provide, but also safe tent camping sites. For over the last year or so, that place has been our parks, like People's and Wright Park. As one woman said, "Half the time, [the parks are] the only place that we have to go... because that's where we feel safe." We all, whether we are housed or unhoused, desire a safe place to relax and rest.

We echo these voices in saying: Where are people going to go? As one person so powerfully stated, "Move along? Where [are] you going to move along too?" We need more shelter urgently.

Our demands are:

## 1. We need daytime and nighttime shelters!

Tacoma needs to increase shelter bed capacity as well as the types of shelter available – not take it away. This long standing need is only made worse with the proposed code changes. We need more and creative shelter solutions to support our unhoused people in Tacoma.

- a. **We support proposals to increase shelter bed capacity.**
- b. **Use publicly-owned land for small, sanitary, and safe camping sites.**
  - These sites should be small and accessible, located throughout the city.
    - This would alleviate pressure on neighborhoods and services
    - Smaller communities would be easier to access and self-manage.
    - Each site should have proper sanitation, including toilets and trash disposal.
    - Each site should have access to public transportation.
  - This would be a relatively cheap solution, but also would have immediate effect. The city has public land, so let's put it to use!
- c. **We urge the council to start working on this immediately! Winter is coming and the city has a responsibility to prevent deadly exposure and further trauma to unhoused people.**

## 2. Even if the proposed Metro Parks code passes, we need postponement until alternative shelter is provided!

A ban alone will only make the homelessness crisis worse. We call on the council to not pass this code change until there are sufficient alternates in place: daytime and nighttime shelters across the city.

- a. **Make an amendment to postpone effects.**

- b. **Without an amendment, this puts additional pressure on unhoused people to seek new shelter right as the cold & wet season begins.** We already have a crisis of housing instability and the constant search for shelter is stressful and traumatic. Taking away what little people have in the fall & winter months is particularly cruel. Unhoused people will be forced into unsafe and unsanitary situations, and will not solve anything in the larger housing crisis.
- c. **Without an amendment, this puts additional pressure on neighborhoods and businesses in communities that are already feeling the impact of the homelessness crisis.** In effect, it would only perpetuate the toxic conversation of pitting neighborhoods, businesses, and the City against people experiencing homelessness. We need to come together to collectively fight this crisis.
- d. **Without an amendment, this perpetuates the toxic relationship between the police and the unhoused community.** Constant monitoring and criminalization is costly and time-consuming. For the unhoused community, it only instills distrust and feelings of alienation. This time and money could be better used for preventative measures, like keeping people in their homes.

### **3. Set up a Safe Shelter Task-Force!**

Finally, we need the city to create an emergency task force to make sure that this happens quickly. That means centering the voices of people experiencing homeless and coming up with real solutions.

Thank you for your continued response and work for housing justice in Tacoma. We would love to work you more to solve the homelessness crisis.

Sincerely,

Tacoma Democratic Socialists of American (TDSA) & Tacoma Tenants Organizing Committee

## Interview 1

Q: We are trying to organize against the state code change about Metro Parks. We are using that as a platform to push for more shelters and for the City to step up. Thank you for sharing your story. We are going to -- what you share with us is going to be shared at council on the first, but that is it. So it is not going to go public.

A: If you want me there at council, I will be there.

Q: If you want to be at council, city council is at five o'clock.

A: Where?

Q: It is over at the Tacoma Municipal Building around 747 Fawcett.

A: Yeah, I'm not from here. So.

Q: We believe, as socialists, that folks who are experiencing homelessness or have experienced homelessness should have a seat at the table making these big decisions. So thank you for sharing your story. We appreciate you. I'm going to ask about six questions. You are welcome to answer all of them or if you don't want to answer them, just let me know. So what do you think were the reasons that led you into homelessness?

A: I'm a victim of domestic violence. I ran away from my attacker. She actually stalked me down here. Lost my job. So I've been down here a month and a half. I have almost 12 years clean under my belt. So I want to keep it that way, so I ran from my attacker because she is all strung out on heroin. The shelter gave me a chance to -- they took me in. They kept me safe. I have not been bothered by my attacker since being in the shelter. So it gave me a chance to get out of a wrong life.

Q: So shelter has been a place of safety for you?

A: Yeah, it has been very, very safe for me.

Q: So thank you for sharing. So what has your experience been like experiencing homelessness in the City of Tacoma?

A: Well at first I was trying to do things out of my car. That wasn't working. I came to Catholic Community Services on 5050 South Tacoma Way and they started my journey out showing me where I needed to go and where I had to go to serve protection. But homelessness out here on these streets is about the hardest thing I have ever experienced in my life. It's the first time I have ever done this. I had a house, I have cars, I have storages. I lost my home. I have never experienced living on the streets until now and I was scared out of my mind because I didn't know where to turn or how to [indiscernible] these things until I ran into these folks.

Q: Is there anything you would like to share to the council about what your experience has been like?

A: Rough. It has been very rough. If you guys had more resources through your city, it would have been easier for me. If I could have gone somewhere and said, hey, I need some help doing this in a different type of resource besides CCS -- if I could have gone to a corner market and knocked upon a store window and said, oh, my god, look I can go there, I could have. I would have done that first thing I came into town. The resources need to open up, be bigger and broader. The City really needs to step up and say, here, we are going to help you, instead of throwing the police out there and clearing out streets and tents and stuff, have a designated area for another tent city, have it city sponsored --

Q: Saying all the things.

A: Yeah. I really feel that the City should step up and designate or donate a city area block, park that's not being used during the winter. Put some pallets out. Put the tents up, get some tent pallets, or do whatever, what have you. That would make it so much easier.

Q: Use the land you got.

A: Use the land that you guys -- I go around and see all this vacant land owned by the city. Put something there. Get these

people off the street. Yeah, there is drugs, all that. Eliminate that when they move into these places.

Q: Or don't assume that everyone experiencing homelessness --

A: Don't ever assume. People look at me and say, oh, my God, I know who she is. That used to be a drug dealer. Yeah, over 12 years ago. People change. They do. Give them a chance.

Q: So the city council is about to pass a code change against urban camping in public parts. How do you feel about that?

A: I do not like that whatsoever. And if your park is not being used during the winter, why let it sit there and turn brown? Put some people on it that need some help.

Q: How do you think the City is treating folks experiencing homelessness.

A: Like crap. I'm blunt and to the point. If you guys would have a little bit more of an open heart, an open mind, instead of sitting behind your desk, come out and take a look at what's going on. Maybe you would have a change of heart.

Q: And two more questions, if you could as the city government to solve homelessness crisis, what would it be -- in other words, what solutions do you want to see?

A: Open up your parks during the winter. Let them camp at night. If you guys got so many people on your council, throw them in a uniform, go out there and patrol. Do something. Don't just sit there. Don't assume things.

Q: How or you or others be directly affected by this? What do you think it would change?

A: I feel like if you gave a person a safe spot to throw up a tent and say, you know, you have three days to get clean, wash yourself, do not leave your garbage here -- I feel like you guys would have a great response. Have somebody come in for three days, throw up a tent, try to get cleaned up, get some food in their stomach, get some medical maybe. I think the homelessness would kind of cut down. I really do. Or you guys are talking about re-starting getting better with oneself, give a person an opportunity to be in a pallett

house or be in a tent for a few days. The Red Cross throws up tents all the time for people. Why doesn't the City combined with the Red Cross and help the Court come throw up a tent.

Q: Last thing, is there anything else you would like to share with council?

A: Yeah, come out and help us.

## Interview 2

A: Supposed to have 254 low income apartments. So far, I don't think they have met that quota. And where are all the homeless people going to go? If I'm not in -- if I don't go into Nativity House, then I don't have a place to go. I don't have a tent. I don't have a place to go. And the [indiscernible] our security will ask you to move along. Move along? Where you going to move along too? You know, because one, it rains a lot in Washington State. A lot. And to be a safe haven, I have seen a lot of people pass away the last six months, three months. People with decapitated legs, older people. They get thrown in the street and they don't have their families or a certain [indiscernible]. And I think they can be [indiscernible] anyway, basically you are still homeless with your family. You still don't really have a place to go. So you step outside. So where do you go?

I know there is a lot of trash and stuff, but there is a big bin out here behind Bates, and I don't know who it belongs too, but it's a good thing, because I don't think they would trash or just throw trash around if they didn't have -- if they didn't have a place to throw the garbage into. And [indiscernible] out there [indiscernible] the City of Tacoma, that bin would help throw their trash in.

A lot of people feel covered with their tent, you know. But I don't have a tent. So I do sit down and they do ask me to move along. And it is not a comfortable feeling when it is pouring down rain. It is really not a comfortable feeling. And when the temperature drops down like -- right now it is 46, it is not that warm. And it is not that warm in Washington. It hasn't been [indiscernible]. And still when cold weather comes, and they left the doors open to people, only a certain amount of people can come in. So there are still people out there who have tents and nowhere to go.

So I don't know, the builders or the City, or where the money is coming from, it's not coming fast enough, because there is still people. And there is -- the more they close down -- they are closing down corporations -- where are the people going [indiscernible] recession. When I see Kmart close down, [indiscernible]. That's a lot of jobs, minimum wage jobs. You know, everybody don't make \$100,000 a year.

There is a lot of people that do, but we still have to have a [indiscernible] place. Everybody [indiscernible]. So minimum wage makes up, or a living wage makes up for that space, you know? And it keeps -- it is not like the [indiscernible]. Personally, I don't have a [indiscernible] and there is children out in the streets and it is not fair.

Q: So you spoke about the trash earlier. So things like public dumping or restrooms, these things are necessary for people. What kind of other services would you like to see the City provide to people that are out there?

A: Not just these services, [indiscernible] curb where [indiscernible] the City is not keeping up.

Q: What kind of specific services for people for homelessness?

A: Really, those are [indiscernible] those sidewalks that have been lifted up, like this crack right here, this crack, [indiscernible]. But the sidewalks are lifted up, [indiscernible] fall. And those things -- I guess it is part of the city.

Q: That is absolutely part of the city.

A: [Indiscernible] the builders build new [indiscernible] build places to live. The last time I lived at a [indiscernible] the city limits, but it is part of Washington, it was 16 to \$2,500. I as a single woman had to pay 1600 [indiscernible] minimum corporation. No, it's not all about Walmart. [Indiscernible] it's about every corporation that comes in people work, you know, people do work. [Indiscernible] generations [indiscernible] work. So as far as we go, I don't personally [indiscernible]. I have. But I never did [indiscernible]. There is public healthcare they pitch tents [indiscernible]. I never had. But I have been in a tent with my friend and I don't know if I would ever pitch a tent by myself, but the parks are a safer place. A park is more open. People can see if somebody comes to bother you or attack you. They [indiscernible] open there behind the tree or behind the bushes [indiscernible] property there is not a lot of --

Q: Foot traffic is safe. It makes for a safer situation for sure.

Q: Do you think this banning camping parks is going to make things more dangerous for people?

A: [Indiscernible] basically harassing. Harassing. [Indiscernible] come together trying to [indiscernible]. We are not destroying.

### Interview 3

Q: We are interviewing around this Metro Parks thing so that we can hear stories when we push the City to push for more shelter on Tuesday. So these questions -- and this is only going to be shared, for you to know, at council on Tuesday. What was your experience -- what has your experience been like experiencing homelessness in Tacoma?

A: Oh, my God. It's like a roller coaster. Up and down, up and down, up and down. But you have to keep yourself going because there are going to be days that you don't want to be around nobody. You just want to go in the woods somewhere and just basically be by yourself. But the system here in Tacoma is like, okay, we have got homeless people here, but what do we really do? And the sad thing about it, they don't really know what they want to do themselves. That's the sad part. It is not only going bad now, it is going to get worser for the City of Tacoma. So what is the City going to do then?

My suggestion is just like, people, community or whatever get together and just come up with a solution because it is not going to get better, it is going to get worser.

Q: The City is about to pass this code change around banning camping in public parks. How do you feel about that?

A: No disrespect to any one of you guys, to me, the City of Tacoma is trying to push all the homeless people out of the City of Tacoma. Lord forgive me if I'm wrong, but that's how I feel. If you ask any officer or public servant, they come and tell somebody they have to leave, leave to go where? To do what? And the first thing they will say is, "I don't know." That's something to tell a person when him and his wife or his kids -- hope they ain't got no kids. I don't -- anyway. Have no kids out on the sidewalk. I slept on the sidewalk for 3 or 4 years, [indiscernible] they would tell me, I don't know, sir, I don't know. Really? Okay.

Q: So if you could ask the city government for one solution to solve this, what do you think it would be? In other words, what solution do you want to see?

A: I want to see a solution like the Rescue Mission, the Nativity House, more of them places come up and people have a

chance. But now they ain't going to have a chance and are going to end up in jail, basically, and that's sad to say.

Q: And how would you or your other friends on the street, how do you think they would be directly impacted by this if there was more shelter?

A: Some of them would come in. Some won't. Some will. Some people like it rough, but I believe a lot of them will come in because [indiscernible] terrible too.

Q: So is there anything you would like to tell the City about your experience or any last comments about this?

A: For me and my wife, we had an RV. Tacoma public servant took our RV. The following week, we were on the street. That same week, I got wrote up. I had [indiscernible] 18 months. So it was like a roller coaster. I started off up and down, up and down. But you still have to keep your mindset that you don't want to get caught up in nothing -- really nothing. You are just trying to live and survive. And for me, it was hard. Like I said, up and down, up and down, frustrated, mad -- not mad at the world, but mad at myself because I put myself in this predicament or we put ourself in this predicament. But thank God, there is a God. But it was a battle. But the weekend we got a place, and we are going to try to hold onto it the best we know how until we decide to leave Washington state.

#### Interview 4

- Q: So we are interviewing folks because the City is about to vote on a big code change that is really going to impact folks experiencing homelessness and we want to fight to make, one, that not possible, and also to say to the Court we need more shelter.
- A: That we do. Because I was reading in the Tacoma Weekly, they are talking about no tents, well, something with no sides. We are all going to get sick, and they's going to have to hassle us due to the weather getting colder and colder every year anyway.
- Q: And two, and I --
- A: And with the tents, we feel more secure and safe, regardless.
- Q: Yeah, thank you. So I am going to ask you more questions, and of course you are welcome to pass on any of them. These are going to be shared -- so we believe -- we are democratic socialists, so we believe that folks directly experiencing homelessness should have a seat at the table when making decisions around shelters.
- A: I agree.
- Q: So this is part of that work in centering stories when we are trying to push against this. So thank you.
- A: Not a problem.
- Q: What do you think are the reasons that led you fall into homelessness?
- A: Well, with my housing situation, my sister-in-law burnt down our house in 2015. It was an electric fire while she was making tortilla chips. And ever since, we have been trying to jump through all the loops and everything, but it is just not working. And he is about to go back to prison and everything like that.
- Q: I'm sorry, honey. So what has your experience been like experiencing homelessness in the City of Tacoma?

A: It's a struggle. It's day by day. Like everyone wants to rush into making plans but you can't do that. You have to go baby step by baby step. It is definitely a struggle. You don't know who at night is going to try to attack you or anything like that. So you don't want to be out here by yourself, that's for darn sure.

Q: No. And we need more safe shelter.

A: Exactly. Like I'm out here by myself. My husband is going back to prison and I'm going to be filing for divorce since he has been with somebody else for the past two and a half years, and I just found out.

Q: Oh. I'm sorry, honey. So we talked about the city code. So the city council is about to pass the code change against urban camping and parks. How do you feel about that?

A: Half the time, that's the only place that we have to go.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

A: Because that's where we feel safe. My friend, he said I don't care. They can arrest me. I'm not leaving the park, because that's the only place I feel safe. And he's up at People's. And I go from down here, up to People's to Wright's Park where my cousin, [Name Redacted] stays, and her boyfriend.

Q: I haven't seen [Name Redacted] in a long time.

A: She's actually next door.

Q: Okay, tell her to come say hi to me. I haven't seen her in a long time. So what do you think -- how do you think that the City is treating you and other people experiencing homelessness.

A: Not fair at all. The cops are constantly harassing us darn near 24/7. And half the time it is not even time for their quota. They just are bored and want something to do.

Q: If you could ask the City government for one solution to solve the homelessness crisis, what would it be? In other words, what solution do you want to see?

A: Like up by People's Park where they park the trucks, I know last summer that they were working with us trying to make that our area inside the fence. They were going to put lockers, port-a-potties, the whole 9 yards. I think they should continue going towards that goal.

Q: I think too. I'm really pushing for use of public lands, so the City owns land --

A: Just like where the Puget Sound Hospital was. They turned that into a 911 dispatch. That could have been used for tents and stuff. And it is not that far from here, it is not far from anything. Everything is within walking distance. Because the majority of the spots have no trespassing or private property. So regardless, it is like -- I don't listen. So I'm going back and forth through jail anyway.

Q: So followup question, so how would you and others be directly impacted by the solution you just told me? [Personal information & names redacted]

A: We would be happier with it.

Q: And is there anything else you would like the city council to know?

A: We need more resources and supplies. Like the church hands out supplies, but it is like once a week. We go through that within 2 or 3 days. And like with people stealing tents anyway -- that's why I walk around all night because someone ended up stealing mine and [Name Redacted]'s tent.

Q: I'm sorry.

A: Yeah.

Q: Thank you, [Name Redacted]. Love you, and let's fight like hell.

A: Do you have any blankets?

Q: I don't have any blankets on me, but you know who talk to would be [Sandwich] Mike. He is the hook up. So.

A: I missed him yesterday.

Q: He is the person who we need to give stuff to. He is the one that's been street feeding for 25 years.

A: I didn't realize it's been that long.

## Interview 5

Q: We are trying to organize whether these code changes go into effect or not that we need more shelter and services because folks on the street --

A: Yeah, they do.

Q: We had too many people that you and I both love who passed last year. So part of --

A: As a matter of fact, two passed this year too.

Q: Someone passed recently. Who was the most recent?

A: [Name Redacted].

Q: Are you kidding me?

A: Yeah, the one that had his leg cut off.

Q: No.

A: Yeah, he passed --

Q: I bawled like crazy when I heard [Name Redacted] passed last year.

A: Right. He passed -- man, that is so crazy.

Q: There were five deaths -- how many? Five deaths in this parking lot last year within a week. That tells you about the crisis with fentanyl. Here in this parking -- in this parking lot, five people passed last winter because of the fentanyl crisis. It was bad. It also was like the week of Christmas. It was held.

A: Right. And it was cold.

Q: And it was freezing.

A: So they really need shelter and stuff, but they should keep letting them camp in the parks as long as they are not, you know, bothering nobody or there ain't no trouble. Because, like on L Street where they camp at that little park, they let them do it during the day time and then at night time,

they have to move over across the street. But it seems pretty safe, you know.

Q: So we are just going to interview. We have a couple of questions right now. So the info -- thanks for sharing your story first and foremost. We are from the local -- the Tacoma chapter of the Democratic Socialists, DSA. And we are here in response to push the City for more shelter services around this because we need to create solutions rather than more bans, to solve homelessness. You know that. And we believe that folks experiencing homelessness or have experienced homelessness need to be at the forefront of that table in creating the solutions. Because if someone from above just makes these solutions, it is not actually going --

A: It is not going to go into effect.

Q: Yeah. Exactly.

A: Got you.

Q: So I know you have housing --

A: Finally.

Q: But when you were experiencing homelessness, what do you think were the reasons that led you to fall into homelessness?

A: Well, my reason was because my mom had to move from -- because you know my mom had a stroke. So she had to move into a lower stairs house, and I just chose not to because she had the one bedroom, I just chose not to. But a lot of the reasons I feel is people lose their homes and --

Q: Rent increases?

A: Yeah, mostly homes and jobs. People lose their homes, and their jobs, and they become homeless, and then that's how all the drug addictions and stuff get started because of the depression of that. Because the more -- the homeless people are basically at the lower part of the totem pole and it seems like every door that should be opening for them seems

to be getting closed instead of opening, and that just makes it even worse. And they just -- because I almost did -- yeah.

Q: It broke my heart to watch you.

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. So what was your experience like experiencing homelessness in the City of Tacoma?

A: Uh.

Q: In other words, do you think there is enough shelter? What would you like to share with the council about your experience in this city?

A: I don't think there was enough shelter, especially for, like, single women and families. They need more and more shelter for them, because it is really hard for a single woman to be homeless because even though I have friends, men friends, that I can go to their house, and never had a problem. But as soon as they found out I was homeless, they tried to take advantage of that in order to let me stay at their place or something. But I was strong on that, so -- buy yeah, definitely need more shelters for the homeless women and children. Even the guys too. But the women and children, their families are really, really important.

Q: I know we talked about parks and I am not going to ask that question, how do you think the City is treating folks experiencing homelessness right now?

A: Very shitty. My honest opinion? Very, very shitty. It is really, really bad how they do them. I feel like, did you know some of these little open spots where they usually camp out at, as long as they keep it clean, they should leave them alone. Because you know, a lot of people can't do shelters. Some of them have mental issues from being homeless so they can't do shelters, so it is better to be out in the tents and stuff, but I think the City is treating people really badly, especially TPD. They are really just -- they just go in and tear up their little campsites that they have, kick them out, put them in jail, and I think it is wrong, especially when they are not doing nothing.

Q: If you could ask the City government for one solution to solve the homelessness crisis, what would it be? In other words, what solution do you want to see?

A: More shelter. More shelters and a little bit more kindness to the people. What do they call that when they try to help them out and stuff, people talk to them and stuff -- more counseling and stuff like that.

Q: Is there any other comments that you would like to share with council around this? This is the final question.

A: [Indiscernible] just please help them out as far as more shelters and make more tent -- like the tent city -- they can build more of those.

Q: Well we don't even have one, we need --

A: We have tent city down there --

Q: The stability site.

A: So we need more of those. So that's what I would tell, my last comment would be.

Q: Okay. Love you a lot. Thank you for sharing your story.

## Interview 6

Q: We are part of a Tacoma chapter of Democratic Socialists, so DSA. We are here in response to push the Tacoma city council to step up and create solutions rather than bans to solve the homelessness crisis. Information gathered from this will be used at the upcoming city council meeting on October 1st. this is not going to go public. This is just to make sure that we center folks' stories during this. Especially because this change would impact folks experiencing homelessness. We believe it is time to push our local government to start thinking creatively about how to solve this crisis for both day and nighttime shelter, because we need it with winter coming. And we also believe folks directly impacted by the crisis should have a seat at the table.

I'm going to ask about six questions. You are more than welcome to pass if there is something you don't want to answer. Thank you. What do you think are the reasons that led you to fall into homelessness?

A: I lost my job. The economy changed a lot and my job was a service based job that was formed around the economics of oil, basically. Those are the big oil companies about 10 or 11 years ago. There is a big oil hegemony in the United States and has been for long time. Those people are billionaires and millionaires. And when government policy changed, then I wasn't quite ready for the change and our company leaders came out on the newsletter that they sent out to all of us -- including us little guys down at the end -- and basically said, hey, you are going to retire whether you like it or not. And if you don't like that change, then you better get on board for something else or, you know, you will basically -- you are going to be bought out anyway.

Q: Okay.

A: So the managers, the people in charge reacted to this more and said we have to do things differently. And doing things differently was craziness. It was a total change in everything.

Q: So you lost your job?

A: Yeah, I couldn't --

Q: Afford a place?

A: I couldn't react to the changes. So -- and fit in, in the job environment. So they fired me. And then after I lost my job, I had a minimalist like --

Q: Yeah.

A: Support. Which wasn't adequate. So I was basically eking by day after day, week after week, month after month hoping something would change or I could make a change that would sustain my situation and it never happened. So I wound up homeless and I had to move into a shelter. And previous to this, I sort of was like a lot of people. I was just going around with blinders on. And I had no idea that there was such a thing as homelessness even. I had no such idea that there was such a thing in the city as a homeless shelter or where it was. Homeless shelters existed but someplace else -- Chicago, Atlanta, or New York, or the big city, and I characterized things like that. I just came down every day to the hospitality kitchen and just made a sandwich, and had a cup of coffee, and said this is it today. Okay, I can't afford breakfast, so I eat breakfast here. And then I go back to dealing with life. And I continued to think, oh, I'm going to get a job, I'm going to get out of this, it will get better. Yeah, this is hard, but you know. But nothing happened. Because of the situation. I was -- I spent my whole economy and my whole way of doing things was based around that job, and once I lost that job, I had no support basically.

Q: So I'm just going to ask one more question, if you could ask the city council for one solution to solve this crisis, what would it be? In other words, what solution would you want to see if you could ask for something from the council?

A: I don't know. I -- people use different phraseology about this in recovery programs, and I guess at this point I would be the type of person to say I don't feel healthy enough to be able to address the city council. Yes, I know I'm a citizen of this city, but in terms of dealing with the whole politics and economics of the United States, I have just -- I'm just one step above giving up. They still send me this political stuff. They still send me the voters pamphlet. I still read it. I'm still a voter and stuff, but I missed the

last two elections. I had everything in the envelope and was up there on South 9th or whatever to mail it, but I mailed it a day late, so it didn't get counted. So I realized that. So then that was really depressing for me because I realized, hey, you know, you can't do things this way and get your vote counted.

## Interview 7

Q: Hey [Name Redacted], thanks for sharing your story. I think your story and voice is really important. So we are interviewing folks in response to on Tuesday there is going to be a vote -- the city council is voting potentially to ban tents in parks, and we are trying to respond and fight.

A: Dude, me and my boyfriend already sleep in the park.

Q: Yeah, so I think your voice is really important to speak out about this.

A: So it's the only safe place I think I have to sleep. Me and my boyfriend like it in the park because it is quiet. It's serene. It's -- it's so much more relaxing.

Q: Yeah, I get you.

A: If we didn't have to tear down all the time -- because we pick it up all the time. We pick it apart -- we pick up the park where we sleep. We even -- sometimes we tear down and move across the street, and tear down and put it back up.

Q: So this info, what you are sharing with me is -- we are going to share stories as council.

A: And my boyfriend is not [Name Redacted].

Q: Okay.

A: It's [Name Redacted].

Q: That's okay. At council on the first. So this information is only going to that purpose. I just want to tell you that. So we believe that, one, we are speaking out against this park ban, this code change --

A: But is it going to be where we can sleep in the park at night too?

Q: I have no -- this --

A: I hope so because I feel so much safer being able to sleep in the park instead of tearing down all the time. People's Park can have their [indiscernible] park. There are tents up in

the park all the time. But Wright's park you have to tear them down, and you move out. It's not fair.

Q: Yeah. So.

A: If we have to do it, then People's Park has to do it.

Q: Well, this would be -- so this -- this code change that is being voted on would ban any sort of tents in public parks in the whole City of Tacoma, which we believe, one, is not okay. But also --

A: It's not.

Q: -- this is a time in which we push for things that we want and we --

A: I want to be able to sleep in my park. I want to be able to feel safe. I don't feel safe sleeping in a church parking lot where somebody can come and get me when my boyfriend is not home.

Q: Okay.

A: I feel safer because if have to, you know, if something happens at least I got my access to my bat that I hang -- is right there. I got bike parts outside that if I get attacked outside my tent I got bike parts to defend myself with. But I have to keep that stuff packed up if I'm across the street. I want to be able to be safe. I don't want to be scared to be somewhere else.

Q: Yeah. I agree with you. So I'm going to ask you a few questions. So I'm going to ask you about six questions, if that's okay --

A: I'll tell my boyfriend, [Name Redacted], to come down here and talk to you.

Q: Okay. Great. So what do you think were the reasons that led you to falling into homelessness?

A: My drug habit.

Q: Okay. Yeah. And --

A: And that my mom died.

Q: What has your experience been experiencing homelessness in the City of Tacoma?

A: Having to always be chased down by the police.

Q: Do you think that there is enough shelter?

A: No.

Q: And then what would you --

A: I wouldn't stay in a shelter anyway, but.

Q: What would you like to share with council about your experience?

A: It is just it would be easier if we had a place to go. If I had a safe place to sleep at night or I have a safe place to sleep when I'm asleep when my boyfriend is home and what not, but if I don't have a safe place to sleep, I don't feel comfortable. I don't sleep. I stay high. I stay doped up. I can't help it. I'm not going to be scared to --

Q: You have to stay awake, especially if you are sleeping in --

A: If I'm sleeping on the streets or sleeping in a parking lot, I got to stay awake so nobody comes and hurts me.

Q: So the city council is about to pass this code change, potentially, against urban camping in public parks. How do you feel about that?

A: I don't like it. I hate it. Why don't they just let us have that? People's Park used to have -- and that's a Metro Park too. They get to have their tents up. Why can't we?

Q: Well this would ban everything.

A: I know, but right now, they get to have their tents up in the park 24/7. Why can't we? We get chased out by the police.

Q: If this code change does go to pass, it would go to effect, immediately. So all tents. So the People's Park tents would be cleared.

A: But it is not fair that we get chased out right now before the change.

Q: I get you.

A: It's not fair.

Q: How do you think that the City is treating you and other folks experiencing homelessness?

A: They are treating us like sh\*\*. I'm not going to butter coat it, sugar coat it, or nothing. They don't give a fuck about us. They don't give a f\*\*\* about us at all.

Q: If you could ask the City government for one solution to solve this homelessness crisis, what would it be? In other words, what solution do you want to see?

A: More help getting apartments. More help with being housed and sh\*\* like that. It would be way easier if somebody gave us -- just helped us out and gave us an apartment and see if we could do it.

Q: Yeah.

A: I could have done it. I was two weeks away from being handed an apartment from, f\*\*\*ing, the State, to get my kids back. And [Names Redacted] screwed me. Two weeks away from having my own apartment, a three-bedroom apartment with m\*\*\*\*\*-f\*\*\*ing --

Q: Need more housing --

A: Walk-in closet. A Jacuzzi unit for a bathtub in the master bathroom.

Q: Yeah, we need more affordable housing.

A: Yeah, man.

Q: Is there any other comments you would like to share with the council about this?

A: I just wish that council would realize that the homelessness wouldn't be so bad if they actually tried to help us instead of f\*\*\* us. I mean, seriously.

Q: Yeah, I get you.

## Interview 8

Q: We are here because we believe that we need more shelter in Tacoma, and this is a time in which we can push for it, and we believe that there should be more solutions rather than bands. And we also believe that folks who are experiencing homelessness now and have in the past should be at the center of making these solutions, because it needs to be part of the conversation, so this is part of that work.

A: Okay.

Q: So we are going to be sharing these stories at council when we are trying to push for stuff. So this is why we are interviewing. Okay? This information is only going to be shared there. So I'm going to ask you about six questions or so. And feel free if you don't want to answer any.

So I know you have housing now, but when you were experiencing homelessness, what do you think that were the reasons that led you into falling into homelessness?

A: Just not being able to pay rent and stuff. Job got tight. Manager making hours tight, and stuff like, that. Not making enough.

Q: Yeah. And the rents.

A: And the rents.

Q: Increasing.

A: Yeah, and my rent went up, everything else. So.

Q: What was your experience like experiencing homelessness in the City?

A: It was -- it was hard just looking for housing period. Just being reliable to tap into the resources that are here locally, and it is not about the resources having it -- it is just a lot of people. There is just a lot of people that are homeless.

Q: A lot of people and not enough.

A: A lot of people. It was tough, the five years I was homeless. And then otherwise that, it is just -- I don't know -- I don't know how to put it. It was just [indiscernible] become homeless and staying on top of what I needed to so I can be coming from homelessness. What else would you like to know?

Q: So the City council is about to pass a code change against urban camping. How do you feel about that? In parks.

A: In parks and stuff? Well, how do I feel? You got to sleep where you got to sleep. It is getting pretty ugly, but at the end of the day there is -- children play at the park. There is stuff that is being done that is not supposed to be done, you know, where the kids are, and it is all about respect at the end of the day, for the children, and for the parks itself, so people can go and get away from their home to go to somewhere to get away. That's people's mediation spot too. You know? You don't want to be trapped in your house 24/7. You want to take a walk outside in the park, people's routines. And that kind of atmosphere throws you off.

Q: We want parks to be parks, but we also need -- this is my opinion that the City needs to provide another place. Another place for folks to camp.

A: Exactly. Exactly. I hear you on that. Exactly.

Q: How do you think the City is treating -- the City government is treating folks experiencing homelessness right now? Because they are technically citizens.

A: It's nothing. I mean you can't explain what's understood already. That's how I feel, it's like, so what. That's how I feel -- there needs to be more shelters, and there is not. And firm action, like all this money needs to go straight, like, bam, we are going to do this shelter, bam, let's do it. Not -- you know, there is a lot of laws that have to be passed, just [indiscernible]. Yeah, and I'm really getting into this myself because I see it on the news, and I'm really in tune with the news now. And you know, from being homeless, I got a [indiscernible] to watch the news. I never -- none of this. But to see what was going on in the world now, yeah. So yeah.

Q: If you could -- that leads into my next question. If you could ask the City government for one solution to solve the homelessness crisis, what would it be? In other words, what solution do you want to see around solving the homeless --

A: Trying to solve the -- just more places for them to go. A few more shelters. More [indiscernible] case management with them. There is a lot of people I know that have mental health issues that are homeless and are not -- it is not that they don't want to it is just that they don't know how to anymore, and they need more advocacy.

Q: You and I both know that experiencing homelessness creates mental health --

A: Exactly, and it had for me, and I have been going to Greater Lakes for almost four years now due to the five years of homelessness. And it sent me out there --

Q: It's trauma.

A: It's trauma. It is. Yes, ma'am.

Q: And then, so how do you think -- so this is a followup on that. How do you think folks would be directly impacted by this change? What do you think it would do?

A: It would do -- it would give more hope to people that people really do care, that people really do care, that it could be done, that they don't have to be out here in these streets, that they can get further than just that -- it is always a rut. Just once you are homeless, then it is like -- well, like even me being in my apartment for a year, it's like now I'm -- I don't want to say -- it is a huge blessing, but just to be absent. Now I'm absent from the world, I feel like, I'm absent because now -- and there is nothing I can do because I can't bring all these people to my house, it would get me put out. It makes me feel [indiscernible] way, you know?

Q: What we can do is advocate.

A: Advocate for others. That's the thing, I'm advocating for others. I'm advocating for [Name Redacted] right now. And she

has been -- she was staying down at the Merkel Motel when they put all those people out --

Q: Oh, my God.

A: Yeah.

Q: She has been homeless since then and now she is on the streets. And I can't get her housing right now. And I need help right now to get her housing because my apartment building -- since I'm on HUD housing, they told me --

A: She can't --

Q: They put a note on my door a week ago and told me they gave me 48 hours to get things situated. They already had worked with me since April --

## Interview 9

Q: Did you know about on Tuesday the City council is voting on whether to pass a code change to ban urban camping in public parks?

A: Nope, I didn't know that.

Q: So we are here, this is my friend [Name Redacted]. We are from DSA and TTOC. We are organizing to try, one, to stop this. But also more importantly is whether this code change goes into effect or not, the City needs to step up its game in solving the homelessness crisis. And especially, how do we push for more shelters. So that's why we are interviewing folks because it is kind of the right time right now to really do that. The City is receptive to that. And we believe as socialists that folks experiencing homelessness or have experienced homelessness should be at the front of the table in making those solutions because it is the things that are -- it should just be folks from above making these solutions. So part of our collecting of stories today is about sharing that at council. So what we are recording today and the questions that we are going to ask is only going to be shared at that council meeting.

A: Okay. Well, my big problem with the way homelessness is handled around here is that housing and shelters are handled by religious groups, and the majority of the money goes to administration costs and not the actual services they are supposed to be providing.

Q: And we want to push the City to do this. Yeah, not churches.

A: Yeah, and the thing about it is, though, is that those churches control who gets elected to city and council positions, and churches should not be allowed to influence elections like that, and they should not be given money by the State or the feds to distribute how they see fit while soaking up money for administration costs, and claiming non-profit organization status. That is just one of my personal beefs, but it is what it is.

Q: So I'm going to ask you about six questions. Feel free -- if you don't want to answer one, you don't have to. Thank you for sharing your story. What do you think -- I'm going to ask

you specifically about your experience around homelessness, but what do you want to see the City step up and do? That's my questions around that. What do you think were the reasons that led you to falling into homelessness?

A: Well, I was living in a house that was supposed to be owner occupied and when I asked for a reference letter from the homeowner, she let me know that I was not supposed to let anyone know that I had stayed in her house because it was supposed to be an owner-occupied house and she was receiving benefits and tax breaks through MDC and, yeah.

Q: And you were immediately evicted.

A: Almost. Yes.

Q: So what has your experience been like experiencing homelessness in the City of Tacoma?

A: Ever so slightly traumatizing, but manageable.

Q: Do you think there is enough shelter?

A: Oh, absolutely not. I have watched a family get turned away last night because there wasn't beds available, and I got to hear shelter staff say it was pretty much the situation with all the shelters in Tacoma right now. And since it is illegal to sleep in your car, if the shelters are plugged, then your options are camping or get arrested.

Q: And is -- so I'll move on. So the city council is about to pass this code change against urban camping in public parks. How do you feel about that?

A: Um (long pause). On the one hand I do have a problem with people doing the urban camping things because there should be other options available. There just should be other options available. By taking away the options or limiting the options, and making it illegal, they are just increasing the number of people who are going to be getting in trouble with the police and therefore necessitating more police and more places to put people other than shelters. It is not exactly helpful to anyone as far as the public goes.

Q: How do you think the City is treating you and other folks experiencing homelessness?

A: Well, as far as the way the City is treating me, I haven't contacted the Tacoma Housing Authority. I had a case manager who should have done stuff through the Tacoma Housing Authority and because of the confusion with my mental health provider's office, the shelter, and all these different places where I have case managers but nobody wants to dip into somebody else's pot as far as handling the situation, then I don't even know what waitlist I'm on as far as housing goes, and no one can give me a clear answer because they can't.

Q: It is that complicated waiting game.

A: Well everybody gets paid, and I'm still in a homeless shelter. And my time is running out because all the shelters have a time limit.

Q: So I have two more questions, if you could ask the City government for one solution to solve the homelessness crisis, what would it be? In other words, what solution do you want to see happen in our city?

A: I have never put any thought into that one because it's -- I know what I don't like seeing. And that is the religious favoritism. Because I had a case manager tell me to go spend a night in an emergency shelter and he could get me into housing. I only had to spend one night in a shelter. I spent one night in a shelter, and he recommended I go to -- he was like, well, now I can get you a bed in the New Life program. And I was like, oh, wait a second. That's a 90-day blackout program. It is religion based. And the thing about it is, is that favoritism is the other side of discrimination. And when housing in the City and in the County is based on the matter of favoritism and discrimination, that's a serious freakin' problem. He said -- as far as there being on clear answer to that situation, get rid of the government corruption and the bullshit. As far as the actual solution goes, I can't tell you what that one clear answer would be.

Q: I think the City needs -- what I'm hearing from you is relying on churches to do the work.

A: Well, they are not supposed to be doing the work anyway.

Q: But we have relied on churches, like this one, to do the work.

A: It is one of those things where if churches are going to do it, there can't be any discrimination involved. If the State or the City is receiving funding for it, they need to be the ones handling it, and there is still not supposed to be any discrimination of favoritism involved. And -- I mean, that's just the way it is.

Q: And is there anything else you would like -- you would like to share to council? It might be about your experiencing homelessness in Tacoma, something that you want to see, or about this Metro Park things in general.

A: Okay. The Tacoma Rescue Mission -- I couldn't even take a shower while I was there because the condition of the showers. I had to leave the premises just to be able to take a freakin' shower. Now it is not that they don't have shower heads -- and I have actually got pictures on my phone of what their showers look like -- the holes in the walls and everything else, no curtains, just 12 shower heads. Not even all of them work. And having some issues like social phobia and agoraphobia, not the best. And it is the only reason -- it is one of the reasons why I stay --

Q: Here. Yeah, there.

A: Is because, simply because they have doors and walls in the little shower cubicles.

Q: We need shelter services that are safe and supportive of everyone.

A: The other issue is, I mean --

Q: We need more shelters like --

A: Yes, we need more shelters, and they need to streamline the administration costs. Because they would have the funding available if people weren't using it as an excuse to pocket money and funding. And that's all there is to it. The money

is already there. They are already receiving the money. They are just not using it in an appropriate way.

Q: Thanks, dude, we are done.