

Governor Jay Inslee
Director Lisa Brown
Director John Wiesman

Cc:

David Postman
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Amber Leaders
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The 190 undersigned organizations write with great urgency to focus your attention on the immense risk that COVID-19 poses to people experiencing homelessness and to those in unstable housing situations who are one step away from homelessness.

This crisis is unfolding rapidly, and we are all forced to work to prepare, mitigate, and plan for multiple scenarios simultaneously. We appreciate that the state is working rapidly to take measures to slow the spread of this disease, support public health measures and health care interventions, and keep people as safe as possible. We fear that without direct and specific focus on the health, safety, sanitation, and shelter needs of people experiencing homelessness, this already-vulnerable population will not get the immediate and necessary care, practical assistance, and mitigation support resources they need to prevent severe illness, complications, and death.

Washington residents who are currently homeless have much more serious health concerns than those who have homes. They are likely to have multiple acute and chronic health and behavioral health needs and are disproportionately living with disabilities. Many have complex medical needs or are medically fragile or elderly. In too many shelters, thousands of these vulnerable people are in close quarters, where they may not be able to comply with current public health guidance. Others may be in shelter that is only available overnight or only part of the day, or without shelter altogether. People who are homeless are at increased risk of serious illness or worse when (not if) they are exposed to the coronavirus.

Therefore, the undersigned organizations, many whom work to provide shelter, housing, health and behavioral health services, prevention, food, transportation, employment, childcare, and other vital human services respectfully and urgently request the following:

- Please assign a state agency to be in charge of coordination and act as a “centralized command” for providers, agencies, and local government to point to. Commerce is best equipped for this role given their staff who have deep expertise on homelessness, shelter, housing, and their connections with providers across the state.
- More shelter beds are needed in order to employ social distancing in the homeless shelter system. In addition to what is needed to keep our shelter system operating safely and in accordance with local and state guidance at current capacity, we need to shelter thousands

more people in a variety of ways.

- More beds are needed for isolation, quarantine, and respite for people who do not have homes in order to provide appropriate care at sub-hospital sites.
- More personnel are needed to staff shelters and related services, and to fill in as shelter workers fall ill. These personnel will need training and orientation to match the settings in which they will be deployed. Funds are needed to increase staffing.
- Homeless direct service providers must be prioritized for testing along with health care providers in order to allow quick action to identify and slow the spread of infection and disease among this medically fragile population.
- Additional supplies such as personal protective equipment (as appropriate), cleaning, sanitation, and hygiene materials and equipment (including portable handwashing stations and mobile hygiene units), and blankets, tents, and tarps and field kitchens are needed to support those who will shelter in place are needed.
- Providers of affordable and rent-restricted housing to those who are vulnerable or medically fragile, including Permanent Supportive Housing providers and providers of housing to seniors and to people with disabilities, need access to testing and guidance on how to support and care for tenants who are quarantined or who are in isolation. Basic care resources like food and supplies for these households will be needed as well.
- On-going and updated training is needed for homeless service providers and housing providers on all of the basics of containing the spread and of supporting clients, guests, residents, and tenants who are in isolation or in quarantine.
- State resources are needed for all of the above.
- Lastly, we must act now to prevent more people from experiencing homelessness by;
 - a) Placing a moratorium on evictions for the duration of this crisis. Already we see many tenants who have been served with eviction notices who are not able to attend court because their health status is fragile, and they cannot risk exposure by using public transportation or being in crowded public areas. Even with a solid defense, tenants who are unable to show up in court will lose, and
 - b) Providing rental assistance to households to prevent evictions. Many households are facing unemployment or reduced work hours, and evictions statewide will increase without a significant investment in rental assistance. Increases in rental assistance should go hand-in-hand with a moratorium on evictions.

- Lastly, we must ensure that we do not make people who are currently homeless and without shelter more susceptible to COVID-19 or other diseases, and worsen existing health conditions. Personnel whose focus is to identify and displace people who are homeless and living outside or in vehicles should be redirected to work under the supervision of teams with relevant outreach, public health, health care, and behavioral health expertise to disseminate health information, assess and monitor health status, and distribute shelter-in-place resources and sanitation and hygiene supplies to people who cannot be accommodated in shelters.

Please act swiftly to address the needs of this population. Washington State has thousands of people experiencing homelessness, most of them highly vulnerable and in one or more of the known categories of people who are at high risk during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Thank you,

ACLU of Washington
African Community Housing and Development
AFT Washington
Agape Unlimited
American Indian Community Center
Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition
API Chaya
Arts Corps
Asian Counseling and Referral Service
Associated Ministries of Tacoma-Pierce County
ASWSU Global Campus
Attain Housing
Beacon Development Group
Bellevue School District
Bellingham and Whatcom County Housing Authorities
Bellwether Housing
Benefits Law Center
BJs Restaurants
Black Lives Matter Seattle - King County
Blue Mountain Action Council
Bread of Life Mission
Build A Bus Home
Building Changes
Byrd Barr Place
Capitol Hill Housing
Cares of Washington
Casa Latina

Catholic Charities Housing Services (Yakima)
Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington
Catholic Community Services of Western Washington
Chief Seattle Club
Child Care Resources
Children's Alliance
Church Council of Greater Seattle
Clark County Community Services
Coalition Ending Gender-Based Violence
Cocoon House
Columbia Legal Services
Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason and Thurston Counties
Community Action of Skagit County
Community Lunch on Capitol Hill
Community Youth Services
Comprehensive Life Resources
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Council for the Homeless
Dave Purchase Project/Tacoma Needle Exchange
DESC - Downtown Emergency Service Center
Disability Rights Washington
Domestic Abuse Women's Network
Domestic Violence Services of Snohomish County
Eastern Washington University
El Centro de la Raza
Enterprise Community Partners
Enterprise for Equity
Evergreen Treatment Services
Faith Action Network
Family Support Center of South Sound
FamilyWorks
FareStart
Food Lifeline
Friends of Youth
Frontier Behavioral Health
Gay City: Seattle's LGBTQ Center
GMD Development
Green Tree Early Childhood Center
Helping Hand House
Hepatitis Education Project
Home Trust of Skagit
Homeless Network of Yakima County
Homes and Hope Community Land Trust

Homes First
Housing Authority of Chelan County and the City of Wenatchee
Housing Consortium of Everett & Snohomish County
Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County
Imagine Housing
Immanuel Community Services
Interfaith Family Shelter
Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness
Interfaith Works
InterIm Community Development Association
Jewish Family Service
Kent Youth and Family Services
Kidus montessori E.C.D.C
King County Bar Association
Kitsap Community Resources
Kitsap Legal Services
Kitsap Rescue Mission
League of Women Voters of WA
Lifelong AIDS Alliance
LifeWire
Low Income Housing Institute
Lower Columbia Community Action Council, Inc
Mamma's Hands
MAPS-AMEN (American Muslim Empowerment Network)
Mercy Housing Northwest
Metropolitan Development Council (MDC)
Mother Nation
Multi-Service Center
Nakano Associates Landscape Architects
National Association of Social Workers— WA Chapo
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
Navos Wellness Center
Neighborcare Health
Neighborhood House
NeighborWorks of Grays Harbor County
New Beginnings
Next Step Housing
North Helpline
North Seattle Progressives
North Urban Human Service Alliance
Northwest Harvest
Northwest Hospitality
Northwest Progressive Institute
Office of Rural & Farmworker Housing

Olympic Community Action Programs
OPAL Community Land Trust
Operation Nightwatch
Opportunity Council
Pacific Northwest Conference, United Church of Christ
Parkview Services
Partners for Rural Washington
Planned Parenthood Votes Northwest and Hawaii
Plymouth Housing
Project Access Northwest
Providence
Public Defender Association
Quaker Voice on Washington Public Policy
REACH CDC
Real Change
Resident Action Project
ROOTS Young Adult Shelter
Sage Conservation
Seattle Human Services Coalition
Seattle Indian Health Board
Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness
Serenity House of Clallam County
SMR architects
Snoqualmie Valley Shelter Services
Solid Ground
Somali Family Safety Task Force
South King County Food Coalition
South Kitsap Helpline
South Puget Sound Habitat for Humanity
Southwest Youth and Family Services
Spokane County United Way
Spokane Regional Health District
Statewide Poverty Action Network
Street Medicine Team, Public health
Street Youth Ministries
Tacoma Democratic Socialists of America
Tacoma Ministerial Alliance
Tacoma-Pierce County Affordable Housing Consortium
Tenants Union of Washington State
The Arc of King County
The Auburn Food Bank
The Coffee OASIS - Youth Programs
The Fig Tree
The Lighthouse - Advocacy, Prevention, and Education Center

The Mockingbird Society
The Renton Housing Authority
The STAR Project
Third Place Design Co-operative
Transit Riders Union
United Way of King County
United Ways of the Pacific Northwest
Urban Business Support
Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle
Valeo Vocation
Walla Walla County Department of Community Health
Washington Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy
Washington Community Action Network
Washington Conservation Voters
Washington Environmental Council
Washington Homeownership Resource Center
Washington Kids in Transition
Washington Low Income Housing Alliance
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Washington Progress Alliance
Washington Recovery Alliance
Washington State Budget & Policy Center
Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Washington State Community Action Partnership
Washington State Housing Finance Commission
Washington State Poor People's Campaign
Wellspring Family Services
Westminster Congregational UCC
Youth Development Executives of King County
YouthCare
YWCA Pierce County
YWCA Seattle | King | Snohomish