

**Department of Human Services**

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June 5, 2020

Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness

c/o Gerrit Nyland

Dear Mr. Nyland & Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness:

Thank you for the input; we share your goals of ensuring people get into and sustain safe housing as quickly as possible. We also agree with the CARES Act intent of finding solutions that are both immediate and sustainable. Following are comments and input in response to the recommendations in your letter of May 18.

New Shelters

* **Shift from large to smaller distributed shelters** – You are correct, this may mark a fundamental shift in how we provide shelter, at least in that we should segregate out the most vulnerable clients. Many shelters are doing this already with hotel rooms, and we will continue to support that response as long as possible. We’ve convened an initial conversation about this with current providers and will do more in the near future.
* **Purchase hotel as short-term shelter response** – This may be a solution we are willing to consider if the right property is identified, but we are concerned about long-term obligations to maintain a new asset. We are working with facilities to do some initial work here (to identify potential properties).
* **Establish a County-sanctioned campground** – This is worth considering as an option, particularly if we can find an already-existing campground to redeploy in this manner (to aid in management and force a limited duration). I do not agree that self-management is sufficient. The challenge will be with competing demands to open campgrounds for the general population.
* **Tacoma Stability site** – I agree that this solution is not ideal for the county because it is not sustainable.

Safe Car Lots

* Outside of the suggestion considered above of identifying an established campground for short-term use as a shelter, the County is aligned with the City in terms of NOT enabling people living in their cars, for the following reasons:
  + People living in their cars is not a COVID-caused condition;
  + Enabling people to live in their cars is not a humane way to spend community resources, and as a community we are focused on seeking more permanent housing solutions; and
  + Sanctioned parking is not safe unless it is fully staffed and regulated; which would limit available funds for more sustainable responses and permanent housing options.
* Instead of supporting people to live in their cars, the City of Tacoma and Pierce County Human Services, in collaboration with the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, have focused on the following:
  + Supporting emergency shelter providers with access to supplies, information, volunteers, and Personal Protection Equipment (PPE);
  + Funding emergency shelter supports and expansion to allow for social distancing and additional capacity throughout Pierce County;
  + Allowing some ability to park in a few expanded shelter operations;
  + Funding and implementing hygiene stations, handwashing stations, and shower locations throughout Pierce County;
  + Funding and implementing homeless prevention programs for households outside the City of Tacoma who would be at risk of losing their housing; and
  + Supporting outreach teams throughout Pierce County with information, supplies, and PPE.

Hygiene Resources

* We have secured hygiene services at Sprinker Recreation Center, and at three local YMCAs in our county where homeless and other individuals without access to hygiene services can go to shower and use other facilities.
* We support the efforts of the Health Department and other entities to establish handwashing stations and port-a-potties in high-traffic areas, when they can be adequately monitored and appropriately serviced.
* We are working with GTCF and other resources to fund hygiene equipment for our shower sites and for outreach teams to distribute.
* The County is not interested in buying a laundromat, but staff will consider partnering with an existing operator if the need is verified and an opportunity identified.

Racial Equity and Homelessness

* We agree on the importance of using outcomes and data to inform our funding decisions, and we are tracking service delivery by sub-population.
* We have and will continue to fund and promote diversion as an effective homeless prevention strategy for all populations.
* We are actively developing various pathways for input into expenditure plans, from providers, stakeholders, and people with lived experience. We will pursue compensating people for their time, within allowable county rules.
* Itinerant grant/data/admin support is an interesting idea, but it’s hard to see how it relates to COVID. We are working with Pierce County Economic Development and GTCF to advocate for resources to support our small non-profits and our faith community.

Behavioral and Physical Health Resources

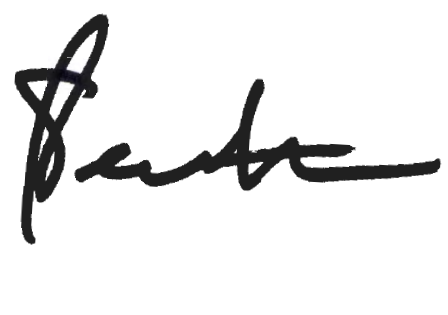
* We are establishing a grant program to help support behavioral health providers reach and serve their clients; many of the solutions offered in this letter will be allowable ways to expend the funds.
* Establishing phone booths and providing technical support is a great idea! We will welcome project submissions in these areas.

General Recommendations

* The County did fund a project proposal for mobile support in an RV; implementation is pending.
* We are working on transportation options.
* Step-down facilities are important and should be part of our long-term strategy for addressing behavioral health and affordable housing, but they are not part of a COVID-related response.

Thanks again for the partnership and great ideas.

Sincerely,



Heather Moss

Director, Pierce County Human Services