

812 North Ainsworth Avenue
Tacoma, WA 98403

September 20, 2021

Dr. Allan Belton, President
Pacific Lutheran University
12180 Park Avenue South
Tacoma, WA 98447

Dr. Isiaah Crawford, President
University of Puget Sound
1500 North Warner Street
Tacoma, WA 98416-1094

Dr. John Carmichael, Interim President
The Evergreen State College
2700 Evergreen Parkway NW
Olympia, WA 98505

Dr. Shelia Edwards Lange, Chancellor
University of Washington Tacoma
1900 Commerce Street
Tacoma, WA 98402-1300

Dear Drs. Belton, Carmichael, Crawford, and Lange:

Surely you are aware of the increasing numbers of people in our community experiencing homelessness and the unhealthy encampments that serve as shelters for many. As I read the visions and missions of your universities, what they have in common is their stated commitment to leadership and service. As the executives of universities, you have the resources that can help end street homelessness in our community—uniquely skilled and experienced faculty and students with a passion for service in departments like nursing, social work, and urban anthropology.

I am new to this homelessness issue and far from expert. I became keenly aware of the growing numbers about a year ago when my daily drives took me past tents that sometimes extended onto the arterial. So far I have learned two things: First, without the tremendous work being done by many, the homelessness problem would be many times worse than it is. Of this I am certain. Second, despite all the money and resources directed at ending homelessness, the current plan is not working.

None of us expected or was prepared for the coronavirus pandemic and its lingering impact. Some wish for a pre-pandemic lifestyle, but most I know hope for a better “normal” and an improved civic life. For me, I can no longer sit by quietly while we have neighbors living on sidewalks. During the summer, I began meeting these neighbors and gave them water. I asked what they needed in addition—and found they requested garbage bags, flashlights, and first aid kits. Now comes cold and wet weather, and I will collect blankets and warm clothing to distribute.

Please call me and I will come to meet with you so we can talk about how to end this crisis. Better, let's not just talk. Walk with me to meet some of those living in encampments, to get to know them and to find out what they need and how you can help. Bring some faculty and students along. Let's challenge one another and push for the urgency required to get services and housing to people that need it.

Sincerely yours,

Richard D. Dorsett
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RDD/ef

cc: Mike Ake, Interim Chief, Tacoma Police Department
Beth Boggs, Executive Director, ALF Tacoma Pierce County
Dr. Josh Garcia, Superintendent, Tacoma Public Schools
Toryono Green, Chief, Tacoma Fire Department
Dr. Ivan Harrell, President, Tacoma Community College
Ryan Mello, Councilmember, Pierce County
Mary Robnett, Prosecuting Attorney, Pierce County
Victoria Woodards, Mayor, City of Tacoma
Dr. Julie A. White, President, Pierce College Fort Steilacoom