



Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness

<https://pchomeless.org/> - info@pchomeless.org

April 16, 2021

To: Mayor Woodards
Tacoma City Council
Neighborhood and Community Services

The Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness is excited to support the changes to the emergency declaration in Ordinance 28755. However, the Coalition is opposed to the proposed public camping ban in Ordinance 28756, which seems in direct opposition to the goals set out in Ordinance 28755. While the Coalition is fully committed to ensuring public spaces such as parks and sidewalks are reserved for their intended uses, we are very concerned that enforcing a camping ban without available accessible shelter will increase suffering.

While the city of Tacoma has increased shelter beds and options, the number of people experiencing homelessness dramatically exceeds current shelter capacity. A recent County estimate identified 1,350 unsheltered individuals in Pierce County, with Coalition counts showing only 40 shelter beds available county-wide. Enforcement to “encourage individuals to take full advantage of the sheltering...” will have massive negative impacts with nearly no positive ones. Fines and incarceration are traumatic events that create barriers to permanent housing. In addition, enforcement of camping laws without accessible shelter is illegal.

We request the City of Tacoma pull Ordinance 28756 until the following actions are completed:

- 1) Establish appropriate, accessible, and available Safe Sites for All prior to changes to City code around the use of public property.
- 2) Work with Pierce County Human Services and the Coalition to determine an accurate unsheltered count in Tacoma and an accurate Tacoma shelter unit inventory and count of available units.
- 3) Lead a City-wide public process with significant community input to establish how to best use public property to provide spaces for activities of daily living for individuals currently unsheltered.
- 4) Completion of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan to End Homelessness.
- 5) Adoption of the Neighborhood and Community Services 5-year Homeless Strategy.

Again, the Coalition is committed to returning our sidewalks to places for pedestrians to walk and our parks to places to recreate. Neither should be places people sleep. Putting all available energy and resources into establishing enough shelter to meet the need must be the next step to returning our public spaces to their intended use. The homelessness emergency will not end with enforcement; it will end with Safe Sites for All and permanent housing.

In closing, we would like to remind the City Council of Resolution 40622 – the City’s acknowledgement of the disparate impacts of system racism and an affirmation of the City’s commitment to anti-racist systems. An Anti-racist effort would provide services to people experiencing homelessness – a group



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with dramatic overrepresentation of the BIPOC community. Unfortunately, Ordinance 28756 gives more power to police to disproportionately put people of color in harm's way. Please pull Ordinance 28756 from consideration.

For the Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness,

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