

The Honorable Jenny Durkin
Mayor of Seattle
P.O. Box 94749
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

Dear Mayor Durkin,

As we near the 5th year of the Seattle and King County state of emergency on homelessness, we are seeing cracks in the system widen and deepen due to the additional stresses borne by our current COVID-19 state of emergency.

Since the coronavirus outbreak began, daily life has changed for our neighbors experiencing homelessness.

- More people are living unsheltered, as shelters close their referral and walk-in programs to ensure safe social distancing.
- Food banks are operating at or past capacity, and community feeding programs have discontinued serving their neighbors, causing food insecurity.
- Vital public services that once ensured safety, hygiene, and temporary shelter for folks who have nowhere else to go have been shut down with the unintended consequence of leaving many without access to these necessities.

What has not changed is that the unhoused population remains one of the most - if not *the* most - vulnerable in our region.

The closing of public spaces has greatly impacted the public health risks to our unhoused population; as evidenced by, the Hepatitis A outbreak that has begun in the Ballard area and the Aurora Corridor. With 125 new cases in King County since 1/1/2020, and 87 of them reported as our unhoused neighbors, it is only a matter of time before that outbreak grows.

Public health necessitates proper hygiene including access to hand-washing stations and toilets. The sparse hygiene kits being distributed by the Navigation team that contain 2 bottles of water, a bar of soap, a couple of snacks, and a pamphlet that has medical information, in a way that is not framed to meet the needs of the unhoused population. These are not an acceptable alternative to access to proper hygiene, drinking water, and restroom services.

We urge the City and County to open the bathrooms of public buildings and provide adequate staffing to maintain social distancing and cleanliness.

- The following library branches have been identified as additional bathrooms and water fountains easily accessible and separated from the library itself: Broadview, Columbia City, Greenwood, Lake City, Northeast, New Holly, Northgate, Rainier Beach, and Wedgwood.
- The city opened Ballard, Capitol Hill, U District, International District and Beacon Hill. Thanks.
- We also urge the City to open all park comfort stations and mobile rest stops for 24-hour use through the duration of the crisis and extend hours of use at community centers and HSD-funded day centers, increasing staffing as needed.
- King County Library System has additional, accessible bathrooms.
- Staffing remains a concern both in personnel and costs. The National Guard could be used to staff both city and county facilities.

In the 2020 adopted budget, \$1,284,000 was earmarked for mobile restroom facilities and recently transferred to Seattle Public Utilities from the Human Services Department to streamline the spending. While it is true that there is a nationwide shortage of mobile restrooms and hygiene facilities, this funding must be utilized swiftly in order to generate hygiene and restroom solutions immediately.

- The City can contract with companies to design and make them locally.
- The City and County must open all park comfort stations and mobile rest stops for 24-hour use through the duration of the crisis and extend hours of use at community centers.
- HSD-funded day centers need additional resources to support staffing, as needed.

Accessibility for our disabled and seniors remains an unmet need. • The City of Seattle and King County officials must make every effort to support our differently abled unhoused population through this crisis by generating solutions that are accessible to all.

- The new hand washing stations are not wheelchair accessible. There is nowhere for unhoused wheelchair users to wash their hands, except for community center shelters or Urban rest stops, which are only open certain hours.
- The City has acquired two mobile shower trailers to make a total of eight showers available, but only to the able-bodied. These trailers are not wheelchair accessible.

The City and County must address food insecurity and clean drinking water, which is making the public health crisis worse.

- There has been a great reduction in food banks and soup kitchens.
- Homeless individuals must travel great lengths by public transit or other means to get basic meals, which is not in keeping with the goal of sheltering in place and minimizing interpersonal contact.
- Without access to clean drinking water, many of our unhoused population are drinking non-potable water which can lead to other public health crises such as the proliferation of Hepatitis A and giardia.
A possible solution for this would be the deployment of National Guard “water buffaloes”, which are large water tank trailers.

Finally, homeless individuals need access to charging stations for medical equipment and telephones. Telephones remain important for reaching medical providers and homeless service providers. Most mental health providers now use telemedicine for mental health and substance use disorder appointments, which are necessary to those with behavioral health concerns. Maintaining services, in this time of COVID-19, is of utmost need for our homeless neighbors.

Addressing these concerns is a paramount duty and responsibility of the City of Seattle and King County Government and must be set at the highest priority to retain the dignity and safety of those in Seattle who have been ordered to stay home but have none.

Respectful from the Community Advisory Group of Seattle/King County Healthcare for the Homeless
ZsaZsa Floyd & Kristina Sawyckj-Co Chairs of Community Advisory Group