

PETITION

THIS IS A PETITION to recognize *unsheltered* homelessness in King County as a public health disaster; AND to create and maintain disaster shelter infrastructure with supportive and navigation services sufficient to serve ALL unsheltered homeless people in King County before the seasonal return of inclement weather in Fall-Winter, 2018.

WE ARE concerned members of the public living in King County, WA; professionals who live, work, train or study in King County and have health, social service, community planning or other relevant expertise; and endorsing organizations.

WE DECLARE that:

- the continued lack of shelter for thousands of people experiencing homelessness in King County is a **public health disaster**,* with imminent threats to the health, well-being and survival of those unsheltered people;
- this public health disaster will worsen when inclement weather and flu season return in Fall-Winter 2018; and
- although the King County and Seattle States of Emergency for homelessness (proclaimed in November 2015) have stimulated commendable initiatives to address homelessness,
- the States of Emergency have failed to diminish the increasing numbers and worsening conditions of people experiencing *unsheltered* homelessness in King County.

WE STRESS that homeless people will have worse physical and mental health problems or will die unnecessarily if they live without safe shelter, while hoping for housing. We summarize the health risks of unsheltered homelessness, associated inequities, and other relevant information in the JUSTIFICATION document prepared for this Petition.

WE STRESS that homelessness disproportionately affects the most vulnerable populations in our society, including people of color, particularly American Indians and Alaska Natives, veterans, youth who identify as LGBTQ+, people with chronic disabilities, and people who report histories of domestic violence, partner abuse, and foster care.

WE STRESS that the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights — co-authored and adopted by the United States in 1948 — declares that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including...housing.”

WE DECLARE that this public health disaster of *unsheltered* homelessness warrants a definitive emergency response. We would not leave our neighbors in tenuous and unsafe living conditions for years if their homes were destroyed by a hurricane, flood or earthquake. Why should the plight of unsheltered homeless people be any different?

WE CALL UPON the King County Board of Health (as an advisory entity) and government leaders of King County, City of Seattle, and other cities in King County (as decision-making entities) to:

- expand King County and Seattle State of Emergency actions to include a definitive emergency response to the public health disaster of *unsheltered* homelessness;
- create large-scale, temporary disaster shelter infrastructure with supportive and navigation functions sufficient to serve ALL unsheltered homeless people in King County, before Fall-Winter, 2018;
- include low-barrier sheltering options for people who have historic impediments to sheltering such as behavioral health and substance use issues;
- maintain that infrastructure and supportive functions until all homeless people in King County can be placed in stable and appropriate transitional or long-term housing; and
- continue the separate but closely related initiatives to prevent homelessness, make homelessness brief and one-time, and expand regional options for affordable housing.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE that disaster shelter is not a cure for homelessness. However, failure to act is medically indefensible. Nobody should have to live outdoors and face a preventable death, disability or disease.

WE STRESS that healthcare, navigation, and other supportive resources can be delivered more effectively and more efficiently at large, established shelter locations, than when people live in scattered and tenuous outdoor locations.

* CDC: “From the standpoint of public health, a **disaster** is defined on the basis of its consequences on health and health services. A disaster is a serious disruption of the functioning of society, causing widespread human, material or environmental losses, that exceeds the local capacity to respond, and calls for external assistance.” [<https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/disaster/default.htm>]

PETITION

JUSTIFICATION — See the JUSTIFICATION statement, prepared for this Petition.

SPECIFIC CALLS FOR ACTION

KING COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

WE CALL UPON the King County Board of Health to:

1. AFFIRM that the continued lack of shelter for thousands of people experiencing homelessness in King County is a public health disaster; and
2. AFFIRM that the public health disaster of *unsheltered* homelessness in King County:
 - a. is caused by multiple past and ongoing socioeconomic problems; and
 - b. is aggravated by the lack of sanitation and hygiene, limited access to healthcare, safety hazards, lack of security, and stress and fears inherent to living in marginalized urban settings; and
 - c. is worsened by unprotected exposure to inclement weather during colder months of the year; and
 - d. poses imminent threats to the health, well-being and survival of unsheltered people; and accordingly
 - e. warrants a definitive emergency response to provide disaster shelter with supportive functions for ALL unsheltered homeless people in King County, before the seasonal return of inclement weather and flu season in Fall-Winter, 2018; and
3. ADVISE leaders in King County, City of Seattle, and other King County city governments to:
 - a. expand King County and Seattle State of Emergency actions to include a definitive emergency response to the public health disaster of *unsheltered* homelessness; and accordingly
 - b. leverage King County and city Comprehensive Emergency Response Plans — or other comparable emergency initiatives — to provide temporary large-scale disaster sheltering for ALL unsheltered homeless people in King County, with emergency support functions that include but are not limited to:
 - 1) water, sanitation and hygiene, food, healthcare, and supportive social services; and
 - 2) personal security, safe storage of personal property, provision for pets, and continuous (24/7) right of access and return; and
 - 3) provision for people with partners or families, and provision for unaccompanied youths; and
 - 4) low-barrier options for people who have historic impediments to sheltering such as behavioral health and substance use issues; and
 - c. explore initiatives in other regions that provide large-scale sheltering for homeless people, such as the large tent-like structures deployed in Tacoma and San Diego, and California legislation that expedites processes for placing crisis shelter on public land; and
 - d. utilize a county-wide Incident Command System (ICS) with appropriate authority to ensure expedient implementation, efficiency, and effective coordination of disaster sheltering and support functions; and
 - e. establish ICS, disaster shelter, and support functions before the seasonal return of inclement weather in Fall-Winter, 2018; and
 - f. maintain this temporary disaster shelter infrastructure with healthcare, navigation, and support functions until all homeless people in King County can be placed in stable and appropriate transitional or long-term housing; and
 - g. continue the separate but closely related initiatives to prevent homelessness, make homelessness brief and one-time, and expand regional options for affordable housing; and
4. ADVISE leaders in King County, City of Seattle, and other cities in King County to:
 - a. create and monitor trackable performance metrics to reduce and eliminate *unsheltered* homelessness, such

PETITION

- as entries to shelter, time in shelter, exits from shelter, exit destinations, and re-entries to shelter; and
- b. apply high priority to those metrics for homelessness program evaluation and decision-making.

KING COUNTY AND CITY GOVERNMENTS

WE CALL UPON government leaders of King County, City of Seattle, and other cities in King County to:

5. AFFIRM that the continued lack of shelter for people experiencing homelessness in King County is a public health disaster, warranting a definitive emergency response, as described in **Actions #1 and #2**; and
6. UTILIZE emergency (disaster) response actions advised in **Action #3**; and
7. MONITOR performance metrics to track reduction and elimination of unsheltered homelessness and APPLY high priority to those metrics for homelessness program evaluation and decision-making, as in **Action #4**.

KING COUNTY

WE CALL UPON King County Executive Constantine and King County Council to:

8. UTILIZE a county-wide Incident Command System (ICS) with appropriate authority to expediently conduct strategic decision making, regional coordination of disaster sheltering and support functions, information sharing, and consequence management throughout the disaster response.

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