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Sent: Monday, November 10, 2014 4:50 PM
To: King County Council
Subject: Written Comments as Provided Orally Today at Public Hearing on Encampment Ordinance #2014-0424
Importance: High

Monday November 10, 2014

Good morning Council members. My name is Karen Studders and I often facilitate meetings between the faith communities and encampments. I am an experienced manager and advocate. I have talked with several of you as part of my volunteer advocacy work for people experiencing homelessness and faith communities seeking to serve the poor. Some of the advocacy groups that I participate in include the Eastside Homelessness Advocacy Council (EHAC), the Eastside Interfaith Social Concerns Council (EISCC), the Interfaith Taskforce on Homelessness (ITFH), the Ballard Community Taskforce on Homelessness and Hunger (BCTHH), and the newly formed state-wide steering committee seeking to decriminalize homelessness in Washington.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to you today. Thank you for your leadership on proposing revisions to and the renewal of the King County Homeless Encampment Ordinance, #2014-0424. Thank you for your leadership during these challenging times. Interim Survival Mechanisms, which include encampments, are critically necessary to keep people alive.

On Thursday of this week, I invite you to join the Women in Black at St. James Cathedral in Seattle at 5:30 PM for the annual Mass of the Deceased Homeless. The bell will toll for the 75 individuals who died last year. In 2014, already 39 people have died on the streets. Without shelter, people die.

Other communities look to King County for guidance. Thank you for allowing encampments on private and public land, in addition to land owned by religious organizations. The existing homeless encampment ordinance has influenced how other communities permit encampments. King County needs to continue its leadership, because the numbers of people experiencing homelessness are increasing and there are now six encampments in King County. In addition more and more municipalities are putting undue restrictions on faith communities as they open their properties to serve the poor living in encampments. Many municipalities limit encampments solely to religious property. Homelessness is not an illness, it is a regional, societal concern. The private and public sectors must participate in solving homelessness.

I am here to raise two issues in the current proposal (V2), which I understand you are positioned to vote upon today. I ask you to please reconsider the timeframe of 92 days and open your mind to 122 days. The reason is math. If municipalities adopt the 92 days and 12 to 18 months before an encampment returns to the same site, there simply are not enough host sites available. On the eastside, two encampments moving every 90 days with the inability to return for 12-18 months requires that 10 sites be available to host every year, 20 sites every two years. This is compounded by the fact that we now have at least six encampments in King County; four in Seattle and two on the eastside. Please do the math about how many sites are needed if six encampments have to move every 92 days and cannot return to the same site for 12 months (as currently proposed in the King County ordinance). In addition, moving is stressful,

requires time and money and detracts from the stability that a resident needs to seek or maintain employment.

Second, I raise an issue that is of grave concern for homeless families. Because, as written the ordinance causes harm to a vulnerable family who seeks shelter in the community of an encampment, by requiring the encampment to call Child Protection Services. King County could direct them to Family Connection Services. We know that we have over 5,000 homeless families in King County. The system is in crisis. Families are becoming homeless after losing their home to foreclosure, being evicted from their rental property after losing a job or increasingly high and uncontrolled rent increases. Please do not further punish families seeking help. Affordable housing is on the decline, the region has one of the largest wealth gaps in the country and Seattle is experiencing the largest rent increase in the entire country. Homeless families are the result. Legislating that an encampment call Child Protective Services is discriminating against poor, unhoused families.

I urge you to ensure that the ordinance you pass, which will be in effect for the next 10 years, protects families in the same way that our schools protect homeless children under the McKinney Vento Act. Support families when they ask for help. Fund shelters which house families. At present, few shelters in King County support families. Faith communities support families living in their cars and host some families in their congregations. I ask King County to fund housing which shelters families in crisis, rather than splitting families up or causing them not to seek help.

Of course, all of my remarks are further magnified by the question of whether an ordinance which limits a religious organization's use of their property is legal under Washington and federal laws.

Please vote for 122 days. Please replace Child Protective i with Family Connections Services.

Thank you very much for your consideration of these important elements before you vote on this ordinance today.

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The world we have created is a product of our thinking. We cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.
--Albert Einstein
