



Date: October 26, 2022
To: Mayor Wheeler and Portland City Commissioners
From: Jennifer Parrish Taylor, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy the Urban League of Portland
Re: Mayor Wheeler's Five Resolutions to Ban Public Camping

Mayor Wheeler and Portland City Commissioners:

My name is Jennifer Parrish Taylor, and I am the Director of Advocacy and Public Policy for the Urban League of Portland. We can all agree that the city and the state is facing a crisis when it comes to affordable housing. It is an issue not only for those who are low-income, who are cost-burdened, and at risk of losing their homes as housing prices continue to reach record highs, but for those most vulnerable in our communities, the chronically unhoused. The mayor's plan is an ambitious one and there are some aspects to it that we can agree on, such as the creation of 20,000 units of affordable housing but we believe a camping ban will disproportionately criminalize Black people who are experiencing homelessness. Black Portlanders are more than twice as likely as their white peers to experience homelessness. Once homeless, they are more impacted by law enforcement: Black individuals experiencing homelessness were nearly four times more likely to be arrested by a Portland police officer than houseless white individuals. A camping ban will undoubtedly lead to an increase in the arrest and criminalization of Black people whose only crime is poverty.

Portland is a city where the median income for Black-led household's keeps us priced out of every single neighborhood. This injustice has continued unabated for decades, worsening with the pandemic. This injustice has continued unabated for decades, worsening with the pandemic. To ban camping in a city where the chasm between market rents and median incomes for Black-led households is to effectively exclude Black residents from our city, to criminalize them for living the consequence of decades of poor planning and weak policy decisions by the city government, is inhumane. There are empty homes right now that outnumber the individuals who are sleeping outdoors. We challenge the city to invest our precious resources more wisely, by buying down market rents in vacant housing and redirecting the enormous expense of traumatic mass camps to services for people who can experience the dignity of housing as they recover from the trauma of homelessness

Additionally, we have concerns on who will pay for said ambition; for far too long, Black communities have had to shoulder the costs of previous City ambitions all in the name of progress. What's been proposed looks to be recycled failed ideas of past predecessors, cobbled together under the political pressure to do something. And though we agree that something should be done, that something should be inclusive of the input of our communities, centering those with lived experience, and those who are doing the hard work on the front lines (often being paid low wages themselves). The success of the Urban League is rooted in the belief that we move at the pace of our clients, that we endeavor to meet them where they are, and that they have the agency to make decisions for themselves, no matter how long that takes because we do not give up on members of our beloved community. Forcing unhoused community



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members into mass camps, serves only to prolong their homelessness, to delay their recovery, and to widen the divide between the haves and have-nots.

We encourage the city to comply with federal guidelines for resolving encampments. We should not give up trying to solve a problem that was decades in the making. This plan is not informed by the people experiencing homelessness, not by the front-line workers who have built a deep trust with unsheltered individuals, and not by the guidance of cities who have learned from the mistakes this council seems poised to make. This seems to be a plan whose sole interest and advisors are members of the business community.

Thank you,

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