

October 25, 2022

## Agency Response to Camping Ban:

Since 1968, Outside In has changed and improved lives by offering health and supportive services to people experiencing homelessness and living in poverty, with extensive services for youth ages 16 to 24. Our services include medical and mental health care, substance use treatment, harm reduction services, meals, case management, employment and education services, transitional and permanent supportive housing. Outside In does not turn anyone away from receiving services but provides focused supportive services to people who are living in tent camps and in other settings not considered permanent housing structures.

There is a homeless crisis here in Portland – and across the nation. It is a tragedy and inhumane that thousands of people are without a safe, stable home to live in our city. At Outside In, we recognize that those who are living in tent camps are the most vulnerable people in our community and it is critical they have access to services that are low barrier, trauma informed, person-centered, and harm reduction-based.

Outside In believes that the proposal from Ted Wheeler to make camping illegal throughout the City of Portland does not address the needs of the camping homeless community; it only punishes the disadvantaged and makes receiving services more difficult for those who are living without permanent and stable housing.

Being homeless is not a crime. Living in a tent or other non-permanent structure, whether it is in an established camping community, when there are no other safe alternatives, is not an action worthy of consequences. It is a choice many have been forced to make due to prolonged underinvestment, bureaucratic disarray, and broken promises that advocates for safe streets and those experiencing the brunt of our housing and economic crisis have consistently raised to decision makers at every level of governance.

Criminalizing homelessness and forcing those experiencing homelessness into designated 'safe' sites is inhumane and does not address the core issues surrounding the needs of this community. This decision will not reduce the barriers of the homeless community but increase and amplify them by creating criminal histories, debt, and loss of autonomy. All people should have the right to choose where and how they choose to live. By enacting Ted Wheeler's plan, the City of Portland is taking that fundamental right away from people who already have such limited choices in life.

Instead of making camping illegal and moving established camping communities into designated camping zones, the City of Portland should move to expedite

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implementation of the “Nearer Term Recommendations” from the Pricing for Equitable Mobility Task Force. This plan would quickly convert existing vacant structures into housing that would meet the needs of people sleeping unsheltered in places that pose a risk to their personal safety, following recommendations in the Here Together Coalition's Road Map. In addition, we support utilizing the City’s emergency powers and resources like the emergency fund and surplus budget to invest more boldly and urgently in Housing First and other proven models that quickly and humanely support people’s direct transition back into permanent homes.

The Mayor is correct that there is a mental health, substance use and housing crisis in Portland, but the services to address these crises are drastically underfunded and under supported. Instead of creating new ways to remove campsites from the view of Portlanders, Ted Wheeler should be doubling down on providing support to these campsites by increasing services that can change and improve lives.

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