



Date: November 3, 2022
To: Mayor Wheeler and Portland City Commissioners
From: Jennifer Parrish Taylor, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy the Urban League of Portland
Re: Agenda Item 927-931

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. I am testifying regarding Mayor Wheeler's five-point-plan and Commissioner Hardesty's proposed amendments to solve the current housing crisis Portland faces.

The mayor's plan is an ambitious one, and we appreciate the urgency with which the city is looking for solutions. We are here today to voice concerns that people of color who **continue** to face disproportionate rates of homelessness will not be served equitably by this plan, and in fact, will be harmed by it. Commissioner Hardesty's amendments are well-intentioned, and we support them, as they diminish some potential for disparate impact on Black communities. We appreciate the leadership she has taken on this issue to attempt to make this regressive resolution less harmful. However, the substance of this proposal is misguided, the community engagement has been abysmal, and the inclusion of mass camps is counter to all known best practices for ending homelessness. Self-organized villages in Portland agree that camps larger than about 30 people are untenable, yet this proposal suggests camps at 10x the scale. This discrepancy is demonstrative how little engagement or understanding of housing instability has informed this resolution.

Other cities, like Seattle, Tampa, and San Francisco have tried mass camps like what is being proposed today. In 2021 the City of [Los Angeles](#) created a camp of about 70 tents that costs the city \$32,000 a year, per tent, to prolong the homelessness of the residents. According to the 2019 Regional Supportive Housing Impact Fund Strategic Framework for the Tri-county Region (Portland area), "supportive housing costs modeled for the RSHIF are, on average, \$16,500 per person per year, or \$45 per day. Supportive housing is more immediately cost effective when compared to the daily costs of crisis care as alternatives to housing."

Banning public camping and creating mass camps will direct resources away from the region's greatest needs: housing. Mass camps exacerbate the problem, harm our neighbors, and diminish safety and autonomy without creating a single unit of housing. We will be squandering precious resources in a period of crisis, prolonging the homelessness of many while solutions exist now. Rather than traumatizing people with mass camps, sweeps, and criminalization, we should be doubling down on supportive housing. With its Move-In Multnomah initiative, the County placed 214 households into homes in the span of just four months. We should scale similar efforts instead of redirecting resources away from them.

There are facets in this proposal that are positive – Resolution 927 is exactly the kind of thinking we need. We also urge the council to dedicate units directly to people who have experienced homelessness and deploy screening criteria that does not disparately impact Black tenants. We also agree with Commissioner Hardesty's amendment to invest money in using eminent domain to buy vacant buildings. We strongly support that the city work to acquire more housing, hotels, and motels, and urgently make these properties for rapidly expanding additional affordable



housing. But please reject Resolution 929. Instead, we ask the city to delve into the proposed solutions of the 3,000 Challenge, a community-driven challenge to the leaders of our region to end homelessness with housing options and service strategies centered on healing, recovery, and equity, guided by people who have experienced homelessness, not by corporate interests. The 3,000 Challenge's policy recommendations include rapidly rehousing people into vacant apartments using rent support, flexible screening criteria, landlord coordination, and wraparound services.

We are disappointed that the city would put forth a proposal that is not inclusive of the input of our houseless neighbors who have been telling us for years that what they need is housing. Again, 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. We urge the Council to reconsider or reject most aspects of this plan. The council should be open to housing as a solution to homelessness for all and must work collaboratively on housing solutions that protect the dignity of every resident.

Thank you,

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