

Speak Out Seattle

January 5, 2017

Delivered to:

Councilmember Mike O'Brien
Seattle City Council District 6 Representative
600 Fourth Avenue, 2nd Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: CB 118794 O'Brien Substitute (10/14/16)
Proposed Ordinance in Committee

Dear Councilmember O'Brien,

The undersigned residents, business owners/managers and/or neighborhood associations of Seattle Districts are writing to you to express our concern that our interests as stakeholders in the City of Seattle are not being heard and considered.

People belong in homes, indoor shelters and/or in rehabilitation facilities where they can get the help they need. Not outside in camps. All focus, time and resources should be directed at locating and funding rapid re-housing combined with social services that will lift unsheltered individuals out of homelessness and toward independent living.

Between 80 to 90% of the unsheltered homeless population in Seattle are suffering from substance addictions and/or mental illness. The remaining 10-20% are simply individuals caught in temporary unfortunate circumstances that can be easily resolved. Camping legislation does nothing to help these individuals and only puts them at more risk. Our coalition supports providing them with resources to deal with these issues to move on to productive lives.

On the other hand, our coalition distinguishes between the above-described vulnerable populations who truly need our help and the other sector of people who have either chosen "urban camping" as a lifestyle choice or are criminals taking advantage of the homelessness crisis to deal drugs and/or engage in property and violent crimes that hurt our vulnerable unsheltered individuals, as well as our neighborhoods.

There is simply no valid reason to take legislative action to allow camping in Seattle's parks and green spaces. The efforts of All Home <http://allhomekc.org> combined with the City's current policies on sweeps that include 1) removal of sites only where a public harm exists, 2) offers of alternative shelter, 3) significant social services outreach prior to removal and 3) far more notice than the 72 hours required by law already address the problems with "sweeps" that the Council was concerned with. In fact, any such legislation is highly inadvisable as it most certainly will lead to more unauthorized urban camping which the City has shown it cannot manage.

Our coalition will strongly oppose any legislation similar to that which you introduced in September 2016, even as amended on October 14, 2016, for the following reasons:

1. It will leave vulnerable individuals living outside under deplorable conditions, including exposure to extreme weather, violent crime and hazardous/toxic conditions;
2. It will lead to significant environmental damage to our parks and green spaces that may take decades to rehabilitate;
3. It will lead to more urban decay, eg., the “broken window syndrome”, that attracts crime and negatively affects public safety;
4. The vagueness of “suitable” versus “unsuitable” locations will be lost on the average unsheltered individuals and individuals will set up camp wherever they can;
5. It will lead to more unauthorized encampments throughout our city. The City has already demonstrated that it is either unable or unwilling to remove encampments and secure sites where significant hazards exist, including traffic dangers and serious criminal activity. At this point in time, there are over 250 unauthorized encampments throughout Seattle and that number is only growing; and
6. It will attract additional unsheltered individuals to our area from other cities and states; and
7. It wastes resources that can be better spent helping our unsheltered population move into independence.

Camping legislation was attempted in Portland, Oregon and was an epic failure. There is no reason to believe that the results will be different in Seattle.

We trust, that as a Seattle Council Member having a duty to protect the rights of all Seattle residents, that you will consider our demand to withdraw your proposed ordinance CB 118794 and move on with positive action that is good for our entire community, eg., locating sites for low-income rapid re-housing with social services to address the reasons leading individuals into homelessness. Our coalition also requests that the City provide transparency to neighborhoods on its efforts and plans to deal with unauthorized urban camping and neighborhood safety.

Please contact us to set up a meeting to occur before January 31, 2017 to discuss your plan forward.

Thank you.

Elisabeth James, District 6 Resident
Interim Coalition Chair
(206) 715-2980

cc: Council President Bruce Harrell
Council Member Sally Bagshaw
Council Member Tim Burgess
Mayor Ed Murray