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Seattle Human Rights Commission
810 3rd Suite 750
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Commissioners:

SHARE strongly endorses an amendment to the Seattle Malicious Harassment Ordinance that includes homeless people as a protected group.

As homeless and formerly homeless men and women, we daily experience prejudice, fear and disrespect because of our lack of housing. Many of us have been victims of hate crimes and harassment because of being homeless. It is no coincidence that almost a quarter of Seattle's murders last year were of homeless people.

Of the many homeless people who died in King County in 2006 at least 59 of them died either through an act of violence or outdoors, in the elements. Over 2,000 people in this County - most of them in Seattle - have no recourse to indoor shelter after every shelter bed is full. It is hard to be more vulnerable than to be asleep, alone, in a public space such as a bench, a doorway, a bridge, or a bush.

That is why, until there is safe indoor shelter for all, there is no act of harassment more malicious than breaking up encampments of homeless people. It is malicious to drive apart people who must rely on one another to stay safe, and who are not harming anyone in their efforts to survive in peace.

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights makes clear that housing is an essential human right. Yet homeless people's right to shelter themselves is often violated in Seattle by both unlawful police action and City Ordinances which target and punish homeless people.

While Judges who hear cases where essential human rights clash with unlawful police action usually do the right thing, it is seldom these cases reach the courts due to insufficient legal resources.

This is why a clear, full and honest definition of malicious harassment would be a substantial step forward both for homeless people in Seattle, and for respect of the human rights of all within our society.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this important problem.

Sincerely,

Katherine G. Valen

Peggy Hates

Christopher Coyne

James Hizdahl

Richard W. Peterson

Kenneth Young

Jack Stirling

Sylvester Blackwell

Everett N. Johnson

Frank Carr

Michael Smith

Richard Hayes

B Mann