



## Seattle Human Rights Commission

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Human Rights Commission demands that the City release information on its use of prison labor to conduct homeless encampment sweeps

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SEATTLE –

The Seattle Human Rights Commission (the Commission) released a resolution calling for the City to immediately release information about, and cease the usage of, Department of Corrections work crews to sweep homeless encampments. Although there have been reports that the practice is currently being, or has been, phased out, it nevertheless condemns the use of these crews.

The Commission is concerned with the ethical implications of using DOC work crews to sweep encampments. The members of such crews often come from backgrounds of housing insecurity and are at greater risk of homelessness due to the lack of adequate re-entry infrastructure. Using one disenfranchised community to displace and disrupt the lives of another, connected community raises serious moral issues that should not be ignored.

There are also serious practical concerns to DOC work crews enacting sweeps. Sweeps inherently jeopardize unsheltered individuals' valuables and necessities and must be done with

the utmost care. By employing DOC labor rather than City employees, the City is outsourcing an essential government function (with constitutional implications) to workers who are neither fairly compensated nor directly accountable to the municipality. The District Court for the Western District of Washington recently held that such crews had violated the constitutional rights of homeless encampment residents.

The Commission furthermore urges the Mayor immediately release relevant information about both the use of DOC crews in encampment sweeps and the use of DOC crews in city work more generally. Penal labor is widely considered a vestige of slavery, and the Commission is concerned with our City perpetuating the practice. Whether the practice (with respect to encampment sweeps) is being phased out does not change this; the public deserves greater transparency. The Commission urges the City to immediately stop the use of such crews now and in the future, particularly given the prospect of constitutional and human rights violations that have resulted from the use of these crews elsewhere in the State.

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