



## City of Seattle

Edward B. Murray, Mayor  
Seattle LGBTQ Commission

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TO: Office of Mayor Edward Murray & City Council of Seattle

FROM: Seattle LGBT Commission

DATE: February 16, 2016

SUBJECT: Recommendations regarding Homelessness

Dear Honorable Councilmembers and Mayor Murray,

As a whole, LGBTQIA communities are disproportionately at risk of experiencing homelessness. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality, nationally one in five trans individuals is discriminated against when seeking a home, and one in five will experience homelessness. An estimated 20-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQIA. Therefore, we, the Seattle LGBTQIA Commission (the "Commission") make following recommendations to the City of Seattle (the "City") to ensure homelessness policies adequately address the needs of LGBTQIA individuals experiencing homelessness.

- **ENSURE SHELTER ACCESS FOR TRANSITIONING OR GENDER NON-CONFORMING INDIVIDUALS:** The City should develop inclusive policies for shelters to ensure that individuals who self-identify across the gender spectrum can access appropriate and safe shelter services. Shelters must have acceptable options for individuals who are transitioning or otherwise gender non-conforming and their families.
- **ALLOW INDIVIDUALS TO SELF-IDENTIFY WHEN ACCESSING SERVICES:** Shelters and service providers must allow individuals to self-identify gender and sexual orientation when accessing services. The City should collect this data from shelters to improve access to shelters for individuals who identify across the gender spectrum and to assess where and how frequently LGBTQ community members use services.
- **PROTECT SAFETY AT SANCTIONED ENCAMPMENTS:** The current projected scale for the number of encampments overall, low-barrier encampments, and sharps containers is too small and needs to be expanded. The population is larger than the current proposed expansion. Multiple sharps containers and maintenance of those sharps containers should exist at each encampment and shelter. Narcan should be made available at all encampments.
- **RECOGNIZE CHOSEN FAMILIES:** Many in the LGBTQIA community experience familial rejection, and create new family groups among the homeless community. These are critical support networks for those experiencing homelessness. The City should develop policies to allow street or chosen families and similar support structures to remain intact when accessing family shelters and transitional housing services.
- **DEVELOP POLICIES FOR UNSANCTIONED ENCAMPMENTS:** The City should not remove people from or clear an unsanctioned encampment without at least 30 days' notice, and must provide a suitable housing alternative. Policies and guidance defining suitable alternatives should include whether the alternatives provided address the unique needs of the LGBTQIA community, including providing options for gender non-conforming individuals, the ability to keep chosen families intact,

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and a viable means to safeguard property. The City should provide substantial outreach prior to removing anyone from an encampment; however, services must be offered but not coerced. The City and outreach workers should work with the LGBTQIA homeless community to understand why they may refuse alternative housing or services.

- **ASSESS AND ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO SHELTERS AND SERVICES:** As outlined in this letter, the LGBTQIA community faces unique barriers when accessing shelters and services which compound existing barriers. The City should work with advocates and LGBTQIA individuals experiencing homelessness to better understand these barriers are and develop strategies to eliminate them. Eliminating alternative hours to allow individuals to access evening jobs and other events will benefit the entire homeless community.
- **DISSEMINATE INFORMATION:** The Commission proposes developing both a virtual and geographical information hub, where all individuals may seek out information regarding services and options, as well as information on homeless rights. The Commission recommends developing a telephone complaint line and online form as a method of tracking harassment, violence, discrimination, among other challenges and indignities our community encounters.
- **TRAIN STAFF & SERVICE PROVIDERS, ENSURE COMPLIANCE:** Mandatory anti-bias training for staff and regular shelter audits will ensure compliance with these policies.

As Commissioners, we oppose the criminalization of homelessness and believe our community, and the entire homeless community, deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. Through these recommendations, we believe the City can better understand and serve this vulnerable group of people. We are available to the Council and Mayor to answer questions or provide further comment on these recommendations.

Sincerely,



Hannah Johnson

On behalf of the City of Seattle LGBTQ Commission