

February 7, 2022

Dear Aurora City Council Members and Mayor Coffman:

Our organizations share the same vision: **ending homelessness in Aurora and improving the health and quality of life for our unhoused neighbors**. In decades of experience working with municipal governments and individuals experiencing homelessness, we have not found compelling evidence that enacting or enforcing urban camping bans provide any meaningful solutions to solving this critical problem. For this reason, **we urge you to vote no on the camping ban ordinance**.

Homelessness in this community, and all communities, is a terrible reality. Compared to housed people, individuals experiencing homelessness have a life expectancy 17.5 years fewer<sup>1</sup>, have higher rates of diabetes, heart attacks, HIV, depression, substance use disorder, hypertension, and undiagnosed mental disorders<sup>2</sup>. Children experiencing homelessness experience emotional and behavioral issues, including anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal, at twice the rate of kids with homes<sup>3</sup>.

**Our shared vision is to resolve homelessness for the hundreds of individuals and families experiencing it in Aurora. Camping bans have the opposite effect of** homelessness resolution and instead create mistrust between law enforcement and unhoused people and make it more difficult for people experiencing homelessness to access critical outreach and assistive services that can bring them indoors and into housing. Camping bans disrupt the progress people experiencing homelessness may be making towards a long-term housing solution, including preventing them from getting medical results or treatment and forcing people to miss their lease-up appointments. Camping bans also often result in confiscated or lost personal property, severe sleep deprivation, and injury from exposure. Given the lack of appropriate emergency shelter, the lack of health, mental health, and substance treatment services for those experiencing homelessness, and the lack of adequate long-term supportive housing and affordable housing for those in need, the proposed camping ban would essentially criminalize the status of being unhoused in Aurora.

Provisions in the ordinance state that the camping ban cannot be enforced until there are adequate housing or sheltering options for them to move to. However, the ordinance does not provide any resources for additional housing or shelter which makes this provision essentially meaningless. It is estimated that there are at least 594 people in Aurora experiencing homelessness, which is likely an undercount<sup>4</sup>, and only 285 year-round consistent shelter beds. The enforcement of this ordinance considering the dearth of local resources will merely serve to push struggling Aurora residents into other resource-strapped communities. Tasking the City Manager to “look for, create, and maintain sufficient shelter options”, as laid out in the

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29267330/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/homelessness-and-health.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://cdphe.colorado.gov/sites/cdphe/files/PSD\\_SDOH\\_Homelessness\\_brief.pdf](https://cdphe.colorado.gov/sites/cdphe/files/PSD_SDOH_Homelessness_brief.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.denverpost.com/2022/01/21/denver-homeless-population-count-2021/>

companion ordinance, is a wholly insufficient strategy to reduce homelessness, and does not address the severe lack of resources, shelter beds and long-term housing that are at the root of the problem. The companion resolution fails to identify timeframes, capacity targets, resources, and funding to carry out its stated goal. We urge investments in housing, services, and shelter as a cost-effective, proven alternative to criminalization.

**In addition to the ineffectiveness of camping bans, criminalizing homelessness is also expensive and time-consuming.** A case study of 7 sweeps in Denver in 2020 estimated more than \$148,000 in costs<sup>5</sup>, including environmental hazmat services, Denver Police Department time, support staff, State Trooper time, and fencing costs. Aurora's 2021 sweeps totaled over \$115,000 in costs, not including staff time which can often make up the majority of the total costs.

Without access to housing and services, many people experiencing homelessness become trapped in a homelessness-jail cycle. Criminalization prevents people from getting on a path to stability and it comes at a major cost to taxpayers.

One of the most impactful strategies for addressing housing instability is Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). PSH combines affordable housing assistance with voluntary support services to address the needs of people experiencing chronic homelessness. Denver's [Social Impact Bond](#) project provides a prime example. More than 360 of the most frequent visitors to emergency rooms, jails, and detox were housed using Housing First and PSH models over the last five years. The results were stunning and included substantial cost savings to local governments and taxpayers. **In total, it cost half as much to provide housing and supportive services than to provide emergency services to people experiencing homelessness.** Evaluators found:

- 86 percent of residents remained housed after one year
- 34 percent reduction in police contacts
- 65 percent reduction in their use of detox
- 40 percent decrease in emergency department visits
- 155 percent increase in office-based health care visits

These findings show that solving homelessness is possible, and that shifting resources away from policing and emergency services toward proven solutions improves outcomes for people experiencing homelessness and the broader community.

In Aurora, homelessness has increased by [roughly 20 percent](#) between 2018 and 2020 (the most recent year in which a complete tally was done). This mirrors the percentage increase in homelessness observed in Denver over the same time period. In Denver, homelessness has been heavily criminalized, with the city conducting two to three sweeps per week. According to a [2020 study](#) by Denver Homeless Out Loud, following sweeps, 70 percent of individuals typically moved to a nearby block and only 20 percent reported going to a shelter, hotel, a friend's home, or otherwise accessing housing. This rigid enforcement effort has clearly failed to reduce the

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://emancipationtheater.com/storage/2021/02/FINAL-MTM-REPORT-2.pdf>

number of people experiencing homelessness and connect people with lasting solutions, and is one Aurora would be unwise to replicate.

Criminalization is not an effective tool to address homelessness. Data-driven solutions centered around affordable housing, emergency shelters, wrap-around services, physical, mental, and behavioral health services are key to reducing homelessness and improving the health and quality of life for Aurorans. We urge you to vote no on this ordinance.

Sincerely,

Healthier Colorado  
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless  
O'Connor Jones: A People's Law Office, LLC  
Colorado Poverty Law Project  
East Colfax Community Collective  
YIMBY Denver  
United for a New Economy  
9to5 Colorado  
Rodfei Tzedek at Congregation Rodef Shalom  
The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado  
Aurora Health Alliance  
Fields Foundation  
Colorado Children's Campaign  
Colorado Cross Disability Coalition  
Colorado Fiscal Institute  
Together Colorado Affordable Housing Committee