



Washington State Legislature

December 31, 2020

The Honorable Governor Jay Inslee
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

Governor Inslee:

For years, the state of Washington has failed those facing homelessness. We have heard this issue is a priority for you and the majority party in the Washington State Legislature, yet what we see is the same, failed approach and an escalation of the crisis. As COVID-19 threatened our public health and decimated our economy over the last nine months, we have also heard little from your office on homelessness – despite having considerable federal resources at your disposal. We are asking for a renewed dialogue and approach to this critical issue.

As you know, the problems that reside in homeless encampments are well documented, which include but are not limited to: safety concerns for those in and around the encampments; humanitarian needs; and negative environmental impacts. Challenges related to mental health and substance abuse have also been exacerbated by government decisions relating to COVID-19. Our state has a moral obligation to help the most vulnerable in our communities, including those whose livelihoods have been devastated by your shutdown orders.

The recent roll out of your 2021-23 operating budget causes us concern with respect to your approach to homelessness. It appears to us that you do not offer a clear plan to address the crisis and the elements – such as mental health and substance abuse – that fuel it. Our assessment is that you simply want to grow programs that have failed to produce positive results for this issue. Your lack of meaningful economic support for small businesses could also result in more unemployment and conditions that lead to personal financial turmoil for Washingtonians.

We also believe that during the pandemic your proclamations largely ignored, and in some cases aggravated, the homelessness crisis. Your eviction moratorium removed the ability for local governments to make decisions on how to address this issue in their communities. We are seeing the negative impacts throughout the state, including Olympia where you can perhaps see from

your mansion grounds the growing homeless encampments along Deschutes Parkway. The larger these encampments become, the greater risk they pose to those in and around the areas and our environment. Our state is failing on this issue and it will only get worse if we do not act soon.

To start a meaningful dialogue, we would appreciate answers to the following questions:

- Do you think our state's homelessness problem has gotten worse or better over the last two years?
- Do you think state programs and services have been effective in addressing our homelessness problem? If so, can you provide us the metrics you are using?
- Do you think your recent budget proposals are going to make a positive, measurable difference in our homelessness problem?
- Have you watched KOMO TV's "Fight for the Soul of Seattle," the follow up to "Seattle is Dying?" If so, do you agree with its conclusion that Seattle's permissive posture has led to the decay, chaos, and business closures in the city?
- Have you considered utilizing more federal CARES Act dollars to address our state's homelessness problem, including more shelter space and services? In August, the Department of Commerce distributed counties some money to construct emergency shelters, but clearly this effort was not enough.
- Do you think the state should utilize more of the Budget Stabilization Account to provide rental relief for those owing large arrears?

We look forward to your answers on these questions, as they will provide a starting point for meaningful conversations.

Our state needs common-sense, sustainable solutions that break the cycle of homelessness, restore our communities, and protect our environment. We have been ready – for months – to come together at a moment's notice to work on meaningful solutions for our state's residents, communities, and businesses. We again ask for a renewed dialogue and approach on this critical issue. Hopefully you stand ready with the same commitment.

Sincerely,

Representative Andrew Barkis



Representative Michelle Caldier



Representative Joe Schmick



Representative Carolyn Eslick



Representative Robert Sutherland



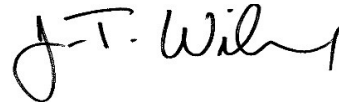
Representative Bob McCaslin



Representative Brandon Vick



Representative J.T. Wilcox



Representative Mike Volz



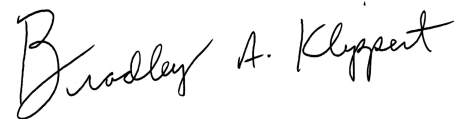
Representative Mary Dye



Representative Keith Goehner



Representative Brad Klippert



Representative Jenny Graham



Representative Gina Mosbrucker



Representative Drew Stokesbary

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

CC: Drew Shirk, Executive Director, Legislative Affairs