DISCOVERY INSTITUTE

The Politics of Ruinous Compassion: How Seattle's Homelessness Policy Perpetuates the Crisis — And How We Can Fix It

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Abstract

The City of Seattle has failed to address its current homelessness crisis. In fact, because of ideological capture and poor public policy, the city has created a system of perverse incentives that has only made the problem worse. In order to truly confront the problem of homelessness, the city's leadership must embrace a policy of realism: dismantle the system of perverse incentives, quickly build emergency shelter, and enforce the law against public camping and drug use. Ultimately, the city currently has enough resources to solve the crisis—it needs to summon the political courage to make the right choices.

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Seattle is a city under siege. Over the past five years, the Emerald City has endured a slow-rolling explosion of homelessness, crime, and addiction. In a one-night count this winter, there were 11,643 people sleeping in tents, cars, and emergency shelters.[1] Property crime has skyrocketed to rates two-and-a-half times that of Los Angeles and four times that of New York City.[2] Cleanup crews pick up tens of thousands of dirty needles from the streets and parks across the city.[3]

At the same time, according to the *Puget Sound Business Journal*, the Seattle metro area spends more than $1 billion on the homelessness crisis every year.[4] That's nearly $100,000 for every homeless man, woman, and child in King County, yet the crisis seems to only have deepened, with more addiction, more crime, and more tent encampments staking their claim in residential neighborhoods. By any measurement, whatever the city is do-

Key Points

- Seattle spends $1 billion per year on the crisis, but homelessness continues to grow
- Seattle's policy of "unlimited compassion" has enabled street homelessness and made the problem worse
- The main driver of homelessness is not rising rents, but a combination of economic dislocation, addiction, mental illness, in-migration, and broken relationships
- Seattle's public policy has created a system of perverse incentives and an unaccountable homelessness bureaucracy that has failed to show results

Policy Recommendations

- Immediately build emergency shelters with 2,500 beds with on-site addiction, mental health, and medical services
- Empower law enforcement to move the street homeless into shelter and enforce a strict ban on public camping
- End policies that create perverse incentives for service providers and break up the "homeless-industrial complex"
- Recognize that the true cause of homelessness is disaffiliation and the loss of human relationships

ing now is not working.

Over the past year, I've spent time in city council meetings, political rallies, homeless encampments, and rehabilitation facilities hoping to understand this paradox: how is it possible that the government spends so much money and, at the same time, makes so little impact? While most of the debate on homelessness has focused on the technical questions that make up the superstructure of our public policy — should we build more shelters, should we build supervised injection sites — I learned that in order to truly unravel this paradox, we must to examine the deeper assumptions and beliefs that have come to shape the way we think about homelessness in cities like Seattle.

As I delved into the story, I discovered that the real battle isn't being waged in the tents, under the bridges, or in the corridors of City Hall. Rather, there's a deeper, ideological war that's currently being won by a loose alliance of four major power centers: the socialist intellectuals, the compassion brigades, the homeless-industrial complex, and the addiction evangelists. Together, these four groups have framed the political debate, diverted hundreds of millions of dollars towards favored projects, and recruited a large phalanx of well-intentioned voters who have bought into the "politics of unlimited compassion."

If we want to truly break through the failed status quo on homelessness in places like Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, we must first understand the dynamics of ideological battlefield, identify the fatal flaws in our current policies, and fundamentally reframe the way we understand the crisis. Until then, we'll continue to dream up utopian schemes that end in failure and despair.

The Socialist Revolutionaries

Seattle has long been well-known as one of the most liberal cities in America.[5] But over the past few years, there's been a coup d'état. The socialist revolutionaries, once relegated to the margins, have declared open war on the mainstream Democratic establishment and pushed the political center of gravity ever leftward.

The leader of this faction, Socialist Alternative city councilwoman Kshama Sawant, is a scorched-earth warrior against capitalism. In her telling, capitalism is the single cause from which all problems emerge. She claims that homelessness is the inevitable result of the Amazon boom, greedy landlords, and rapidly increasing rents.[6] As she told *Street Roots News*: "The explosion of the homelessness crisis is a symptom of how deeply dysfunctional capitalism is and also how much worse living standards have gotten with the last several decades."[7] In this story, the ruthless capitalists of Amazon, Starbucks, Microsoft, and Boeing generate tremendous amounts of wealth for themselves, drive up the price of housing, and push the working class irreversibly towards poverty, inequality, and despair.

On the surface, this argument has its own internal logic: landlords raise the rent, low-wage workers are priced out of their apartments, and their families fall into homelessness. They point to the Zillow[8] and McKinsey[9] studies that show a high correlation between rent increases and homelessness in Seattle. But, in reality, correlation is not causation and the individual survey data paints a remarkably different picture. According to King County's point-in-time study, only 6% of the homeless cited "could not afford rent increase" as the precipitating cause of their predicament.[10] They specify a wide range of other problems — domestic violence, incarceration, mental illness, family conflict, medical conditions, breakups, eviction, addiction, and job loss — as greater contributors to becoming homeless.

Furthermore, although the Zillow study did indeed find a high correlation between rising rents and homelessness in four major

markets — Seattle, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC — it also found that homelessness *decreased* despite rising rents in Houston, Tampa, Chicago, Phoenix, St. Louis, San Diego, Portland, Detroit, Baltimore, Atlanta, Charlotte, and Riverside. While rent increases are a very real burden for the working poor, the evidence suggests that rent increases alone do not push people onto the streets.

In fact, even in an expensive city like Seattle, the vast majority of working- and middle-class residents manage to respond to economic incentives in a number of common sense ways: moving to a less expensive neighborhood, downsizing to a smaller apartment, taking on a roommate, moving in with family, or leaving the city altogether. The reality is that there are more than 1 million people in King County below the median income and 99% of them manage to find a place to live and pay the rent on time. The static aggregate-level analyses from Zillow and McKinsey do not take into account the vast number of options that are available even to the poorest families — and yet, the socialist revolutionaries keep hammering away at "the rent is too damn high" as the explanatory variable for everything.

The socialists are playing a deeply cynical game, using the homelessness crisis as a symbol of "capitalism's moral failure" and a justification for their longstanding policy agenda of rent control, public housing, minimum wage increases, and punitive corporate taxation. While one might be tempted to dismiss Kshama Sawant as a cartoon *subcomandante*, she has been remarkably successful in her campaign to use the image of the homeless to stoke resentment against "Amazon tech bros," punish "the billionaire class" with new taxes, and, at least in her mind, build the worldwide socialist utopia from Seattle outwards.

Unfortunately, the socialist agenda — Tax the Rich, Housing For All, Rent Freeze Now, Raise the Minimum Wage — will not solve the homelessness crisis. Even with Sawant's recently passed (and then repealed) "jobs tax" on large employers,[11] the city would only build a maximum of 187 subsidized housing units per year, which means it will take at least sixty years to provide housing for all of the individuals who are currently homeless. I suspect, however, that Sawant's real passion is not to build houses for the poor, but to tear down the houses of the rich. Once her new taxes fail to usher in the socialist utopia, she will simply find a new scapegoat — corporations, real estate developers, tech workers, police officers — and repeat the process all over again.

The hard truth is that Seattle is now an expensive city. The local government should absolutely strive to create more affordable market-rate housing by increasing density and changing zoning laws,[12] but, given the current reality, for those who are not employed full time — which is the case for 92.5% of the homeless[13] — it's foolish to think that Seattle will be the city of Housing for All. No matter how many impossible promises the socialists make, at some point, they will run out of other people's money. The scapegoats, who have thus far remained silent, will start fighting back. And private companies, which are the primary wealth generators in the city, will simply pack up and move away.

The Compassion Brigades

The compassion brigades are the moral crusaders of homelessness policy. They are the social justice activists who believe "compassion" is the highest virtue and all other considerations must be subordinated to its dictates.

In the political realm, the avatar of the compassion brigades is City Councilman Mike O'Brien. O'Brien — a former chief financial officer for the corporate law firm Stokes Lawrence — made his name in Seattle politics fighting to ban the Yellow Pages[14] and to build a bike lane through a working shipyard in the

Ballard neighborhood.[15] Over the past few years, O'Brien has become a leader in the campaign to legalize homeless encampments throughout the city. He's proposed ordinances to legalize street camping on 167 miles of public sidewalks,[16] legalize RV camping on all city streets,[17] and prevent the city's Navigation Teams from cleaning up tent cities.[18]

In order to justify this policy of unlimited compassion, O'Brien and the compassion brigades have constructed an elaborate mythology about the homeless. When I attended the Seattle CityClub's "Housing the Homeless" seminar, the entire procession of speakers sang from the social justice hymnbook — *compassion, empathy, bias, inequality, root causes, systemic racism* — and the audience nodded along, without a single critical question about specific programs or outcomes.

In practice, the compassion brigades have captured the local political vocabulary about homelessness and elevated a series of myths into accepted wisdom:

• **Myth #1: The homeless are working full-time but can't get ahead.** As O'Brien told the *Denver Post*: "I've got thousands of homeless people that actually are working and just can't afford housing."[19] But according to King County's own survey data, only 7.5% of the homeless report working full-time, despite record low unemployment, record job growth, and a record-high $15 minimum wage.[20] The reality, which is obvious to anyone who's spent time in tent cities or emergency shelters, is that 80% of the homeless suffer from drug and alcohol addiction and 30% suffer from serious mental illness, including bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.[21] This doesn't mean we should "blame the victim" or withdraw our support — it simply means we must be honest about the problem if we hope to solve it.

• **Myth #2: The homeless are "our neighbors" and native to Seattle.** Progressive publications like *The Stranger* insist that "most people experiencing homelessness in Seattle were already here when they became homeless."[22] However, according to the city's own data, 51.1% of Seattle's homeless came from outside the city limits. And even this number might be vastly underestimated, as the survey only asks "where respondents were living at the time they *most recently became homeless*"[23] — so, for example, a person could move to Seattle, check into a motel for a week, then start living on the streets and be considered "from Seattle." More rigorous academic studies in cities like San Francisco[24] and Vancouver[25] suggest that at least 40 and 50% of the homeless moved to those cities in search of a permissive culture and generous services. There's no reason to believe Seattle is any different.

• **Myth #3: The street homeless want help, but there aren't enough services.** In reality, according to county data, 63% of the street homeless refuse shelter when offered by the city's Navigation Teams, claiming "there are too many rules" (39.5%) and "[the shelters] are too crowded" (32.6%).[26] The recent story about a woman's "tent mansion" near the Space Needle is a vivid example of the contingent of the homeless who deliberately choose to live in the streets. In a KIRO7 report, the woman told newscasters that she and her boyfriend moved from West Virginia to Seattle for the "liberal vibe" and have repeatedly refused shelter. "We don't want to change our lifestyle to fit their requirements," she said. "We intend to stay here. This is the solution to the homeless problem. We want autonomy, right here."[27]

The central problem with these mythologies is not simply that they're anti-factual, but are a textbook example of what sociologists call pathological altruism, or, "altruism in which attempts to promote the welfare of others instead result in unanticipated harm."[28] The city's campaign of unlimited compassion has devolved into permissiveness, enablement,

crime, and disorder. Public complaints about homeless encampments from the first three months of this year are a veritable parade of horrors: theft, drugs, fighting, rape, murder, explosions, prostitution, assaults, needles, and feces.[29]

Under pressure from the compassion brigades, prosecutors have dropped thousands of misdemeanor cases[30] and police officers are being directed not to arrest people for "homelessness-related" offenses,[31] including theft, destruction of property, and drug crimes. As Scott Lindsay, the city's former top crime adviser, reported to former Mayor Ed Murray: "The increase in street disorder is largely a function of the fact that heroin, crack, and meth possession has been largely legalized in the city over the past several years. The unintended consequence of that social policy effort has been to make Seattle a much more attractive place to buy and sell hardcore drugs."[32]

And yet, the compassion brigades dutifully man the barricades anytime the city attempts to clean up illegal tent encampments. In the Ravenna neighborhood, protesters holding up a "Homeless Lives Matter" sign linked arms and attempted to block the police from removing a tent city from a public park.[33] Nothing is more important than their own display of compassion — not a mass shooting,[34] not a human immolation,[35] not a vicious rape,[36] not a series of random stabbings.[37] Anyone who questions their narrative about the homeless will be shouted down, labeled a heartless, bigoted NIMBY, and cast into the netherworld of political incorrectness.

The Homeless-Industrial Complex

With more than $1 billion spent on homelessness every year, one would be wise to follow Soviet ideologist Vladimir Lenin's maxim: "When it is not immediately apparent which political or social groups, forces, or alignments advocate certain proposals, measures, etc., one should always ask: who stands to gain?"

In the world of Seattle homelessness, the answer is clear: the biggest winners of the government's massive public programs are an alphabet soup of social service providers like SHARE, LIHI, and DESC, which together constitute the city's "homeless-industrial complex."

King County and the City of Seattle currently spend hundreds of millions of dollars on nonprofit contractors every year. For the leadership of these organizations, homelessness is a lucrative business. In the most recent federal filings, the executive director of LIHI earned $187,209 in annual compensation.[38] The DESC pays employees salaries as high as $193,823 per year.[39]

It wasn't always this way. When I spoke with Eleanor Owen, one of the original cofounders of the DESC, she explained that the mission of the organization has shifted over the years from helping the homeless to securing government contracts, maintaining a $112 million real estate portfolio,[40] and paying a staff of nearly 900 people.[41] "It's disgraceful," she said. "When we started, we kept our costs low and helped people get back on their feet. Now the question is: how can I collect another city contract? How can I collect more Medicaid dollars? How can I collect more federal matching funds? It's more important to keep the staff paid than to actually help the poor become self-sufficient."

The deeper problem is that our social policies have created a system of perverse incentives — these organizations get paid more when the problem gets worse. When their ideas fail to deliver results, they simply repackage them, write a proposal with the latest buzzwords, and return to the public trough for more funding. Homelessness might go up, homelessness might go down, but the leaders of the homeless-industrial complex always get paid.

Their latest scheme in Seattle is to build city-funded "tiny house villages," a eu-

phemism for semi-permanent homeless tent cities subsidized by taxpayers. While touted as a better alternative to illegal encampments, the results have been abysmal. After the city opened a drug-friendly tiny house village in Licton Springs — which costs taxpayers $720,000 a year to operate — the police reported a 221% increase in reported crimes and public disturbances. Neighbors have witnessed an explosion of property destruction, violence, prostitution, and drug dealing.[42]

Even worse, the organization that runs the Licton Springs encampment, SHARE, effectively uses taxpayer money to lobby the city for more taxpayer money. They operate their encampments on a system of "participation credits," requiring residents to attend political rallies, campaign events, and city council hearings.[43] At last year's city income tax hearing at the King County Superior Court, I spoke with a homeless woman who lived in a SHARE encampment who explained that if she did not show up to the court proceeding, she would be kicked out of the camp for one week.

Ultimately, the homeless-industrial complex is a creature of public incentives that is constantly on the hunt for bigger and bigger contracts. Its new promise — based on the Housing First concept, which actually dates back to 1988 — is that if the city funds enough new units of subsidized housing, it will solve the homelessness and cost of living crisis all at once. Advocates insist that the city can build "affordable housing" not only for the homeless, but for everyone earning up to 80% of the median income,[44] which, in King County, is more than 800,000 people. In reality, however, a city can never build its way out of either problem with subsidized housing, which, like any other good, is subject to the laws of supply and demand. If apartments are made available at below-market rents, demand for those units will always outstrip supply, or, to put it in colloquial terms: *if you build it, they will come*. For every apartment the city builds, there will be another hundred people in line, in perpetuity. New York has been building "affordable housing" since 1934 and still has a waitlist of 270,000 families.[45]

Ultimately, until policymakers change the system of incentives, there will be no end to this cycle of waste and corruption. Despite repeated warnings from the city's own homelessness consultants,[46] the city and county governments continue to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars to low-income housing developers and service providers, to no avail. Unless the city can somehow suspend the laws of economics, we will continue to build our way into the ditch.

The Addiction Evangelists

The addiction evangelists are the intellectual heirs of the 1960s counterculture. They are the rebellious Ave Rats, the gutter punks, and the opioid migrants — but now they're all grown up and want their seat at the table.

While the Beats and the Hippies pioneered the rejection of bourgeois values, their efforts were largely confined to the culture — music, literature, photography, and poetry. Today's addiction evangelists have a much more audacious goal: they hope to capture *political power* and elevate their lifestyle of addiction and street homelessness into a protected class. They don't want society to simply accept their choices — they want society to pay for them.

The leading proponent of this campaign is Shilo Murphy, an active heroin and cocaine addict who runs the People's Harm Reduction Alliance. His worldview can be summarized in a series of t-shirts he sports around town: "Proud To Be A Drug User," "Nice People Take Drugs," and "Meth Pipes! Because Crack Pipes Are So Five Years Ago." For Murphy, the goal is not prevention, recovery, or rehabilitation, but to normalize addiction and provide dedicated public funding for the consumption of heroin, meth, and crack cocaine. As he told KUOW: "I have always enjoyed drugs and they've always made my life better. I [see] drugs as not only a

means to escape but a means to inspire me for greatness."[47]

Incredibly, Mr. Murphy has become influential in the world of Seattle politics. The City of Seattle has provided funding for his organization and King County recently recruited him to serve on their opioid task force. His unabashedly pro-addiction campaign is winning: he was one of the key proponents for "safe injection sites" and recently announced a new heroin-on-wheels project in which People's Harm Reduction Alliance vans will roam the city and allow addicts to shoot up under a nurse's supervision.[48]

Officially, the philosophy of addiction evangelists is "harm reduction" — essentially, public dollars are better spent reducing harm than enforcing prohibition — but it's hard not to conclude that their ultimate goal is public support for addiction. While harm reduction has had notable success in countries like Portugal[49] and Switzerland,[50] in North America, where national drug policy is staunchly prohibitionist, individual cities that practice harm reduction have become magnets for addiction, crime, and social disorder.

During the debate on public injection sites last year, the addition evangelists often pointed to Vancouver, BC, which has operated the Insite supervised consumption facility for more than 10 years. While Insite can certainly provide clean needles and administer naloxone injections in response to overdoses, the evidence from a longitudinal study of the Downtown Eastside neighborhood shows that the injection site and concentration of social services have dramatically increased the number of opioid migrants moving to the city. According to the study, between 2006 and 2016, the number of homeless individuals from outside the city increased from 17 to 52% of the total homeless population. Even more disastrously, the study concludes, "migration into urban regions with a high concentration of services may not necessarily lead to effective pathways to recovery."[51] Indeed, since the Insite facility opened, crime in the neighborhood has increased, homelessness has nearly doubled,[52] and there has been no reduction in addiction.[53]

The critical question about harm reduction that's almost never asked is *harm reduction for whom*. There's no question that, whatever harm will be reduced to individual addicts, public consumption sites do tremendous damage to businesses, residents, and cities at large. When I visited Vancouver and drove down Hastings Street, where the Insite facility is housed, it was an apocalyptic vision of Seattle to come — a public health nightmare with hundreds of addicts lining the sidewalks, yelling into the sky, and shooting up behind the dumpsters.

Unfortunately, in Seattle, the influx of migrants has already begun. According to survey data of the homeless, approximately 9.5% of the city's homeless say that they came "for legal marijuana," 15.4% came "to access homeless services," and 15.7% were "traveling or visiting" the region and decided that it was a good place to set up camp.[54] As the city continues to build out its addiction infrastructure and focus social services in the downtown core, the problem will only intensify. Even King County's former homelessness czar admits the city's policies have a "magnet effect" that attracts the homeless from outside the city limits.[55]

Regardless, the addiction evangelists seem to be winning in Seattle. Despite more than 70,000 signatures in support of a ballot initiative to ban safe injection sites countywide, a King County Superior Court judge threw it out in court, declaring that "public health policy is not subject to veto by citizen initiative."[56] In other words, it's a democracy when convenient, but ultimately supervised by the experts and subordinate to the fashionable ideologies of our time.

As the addiction evangelists continue to dominate the public discourse, we're entering into a strange new world where addicts and

vagrants are "good" and Amazon engineers and sober neighbors are "bad." It's hard to imagine how a city can sustain itself on this moral foundation.

Towards a Policy of Realism

In 2005, the leaders of Seattle and King County government formed the Committee to End Homelessness and launched a 10-year plan to *completely eliminate* homelessness in metro Seattle. Despite this initial flourish of confidence, the Ten-Year Plan — darkly reminiscent of the Five-Year Plans of the Communist era — was a dismal failure. Between 2005 and 2015, homelessness in King County increased by 15%, despite *decreasing* by 35% statewide.[57] Somehow, King County fared worse than the rest of the state, which did not have a Committee to End Homelessness. Since then, the situation has only grown worse. As Seattle's current homelessness czar sums it up with superb understatement: "We're spending lots of money trying things out, and are finding what's not working."[58]

Unfortunately, Adrienne Quinn, the new boss of the Committee to End Homelessness — which has since rebranded to All Home — is even worse than the old boss. In an op-ed in the *Seattle Times*, she lays out her plan to "address the root causes of homelessness" by solving "racism," "wage inequity," "climate change," "housing costs," "public transportation," "green building," "sanctuary [cities]," the "child-welfare system," "brain injuries," and "mental-health and addiction services."[59]

This, not surprisingly, requires *more money, more money, more money*. Councilwoman Sawant claims the city needs another $75 million a year to solve the crisis.[60] The consulting firm McKinsey puts the figure at $400 million a year.[61] But the reality is that we can spend another $75 million, $400 million, or $1 billion and it won't make a difference until we correctly diagnose the problem and focus on practical solutions over utopian dreams.

The sad truth is that we are still a nation in denial about homelessness. While ideologues will continue to denounce a wide range of scapegoats who "cause" homelessness — capitalists, landlords, racists, computer programmers — the deeper reality is that homelessness is a product of *disaffiliation*. For the past 70 years, sociologists, political scientists, and theologians have documented the slow atomization of our society. As our family and community bonds continue to weaken, more and more of our most vulnerable citizens fall victim to the addiction, mental illness, isolation, poverty, and despair that almost always precipitate the final slide into homelessness.

Alice Baum and Donald Burnes, who wrote the definitive book on homelessness in the early 1990s, put it this way: "Homelessness is a condition of disengagement from ordinary society — from family, friends, neighborhood, church, and community … Poor people who have family ties, teenaged mothers who have support systems, mentally ill individuals who are able to maintain social and family relationships, alcoholics who are still connected to their friends and jobs, even drug addicts who manage to remain part of their community do not become homeless. Homelessness occurs when people no longer have relationships; they have drifted into isolation, often running away from the support networks they could count on in the past."[62]

As a society, our deepest responsibility to prevent homelessness isn't to build new apartment complexes or pass new tax levies, but to rebuild the family, community, and social bonds that once held America together. While it may be tempting to put forth another ten-year plan to end homelessness, we know that it will most certainly fail. As Richard McAdams, a recovered addict and current outreach worker for the Union Gospel Mission (one of the few organizations having some success addressing homelessness in Seattle),

told me: "There are 6,000 people on the streets in Seattle. I know 3,000 of them by name and know their stories. It's not a resource issue in this city, it's a relational issue. The biggest problem is broken relationships."

In the near term, cities like Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles must shift towards a policy of realism. We must acknowledge that "compassion" without limits is a road to ruin. We must look at homelessness not as a problem to be *solved*, but a problem to be *contained*. We must make a clear statement that we won't cede our parks, schools, and sidewalks to homeless encampments. And we must not continue to spend nearly $1 billion a year to "solve homelessness" without clear accountability and visible results.

Citizens and local governments across the West Coast are starting to demand an end to the policy of unlimited "compassion." Fed-up neighbors recently exploded against Councilman O'Brien at a town hall in Green Lake[63] and members of the Iron Workers Local 86 shouted against Kshama Sawant at a political rally in front of the Amazon Spheres.[64] Even in hyper-progressive San Francisco, acting Mayor Mark Farrell recently announced a dramatic change in the city's understanding of street homelessness: "We have moved as a city from a position of compassion to enabling street behavior. We have offered services time and time again and gotten many off the streets, but there is a resistant population that remains, and their tents have to go. Enough is enough."[65]

A New Agenda for Seattle

In Seattle, Mayor Jenny Durkan, who made her reputation as a federal prosecutor, is faced with a clear choice: continue to appease the compassion brigades and the homeless-industrial complex, or break free from the status quo and take decisive action to address the crisis. She can look to other cities across the United States that have shown that homelessness can be contained with smart, tough policies.

If she can summon the political will, Mayor Durkan can implement a series of emergency measures that will dramatically reduce the social disorder associated with street homelessness:

• **Immediately build emergency shelters with 2,500 beds.** In San Diego, city officials and the private sector worked together to quickly build three barracks-style shelters that house nearly 1,000 people for only $4.5 million. They've moved 700 individuals off the streets and into the emergency shelter, allowing the police and city crews to remove and clean up illegal encampments.[66] In Seattle, the mayor should petition the private sector for $13 million in donations to build similar emergency shelter facilities, construct them on vacant city property in the industrial district, and run a dedicated free bus line from the shelters to the downtown core so residents can access additional services and eventually find work.

• **Empower Navigation Teams to move the street homeless into shelter and enforce a strict public camping ban.** In Houston, local leaders have reduced homelessness by 60% [67]through a combination of providing services and enforcing a zero tolerance policy for street camping, panhandling, trespassing, and property crimes.[68] The police department and its Navigation Teams must be given the authority to enforce the law and put an end to rampant street camping in Seattle. There's nothing compassionate about letting addicts, the mentally ill, and the poor die in the streets of Seattle. The first order of business must be to clean up the streets, move people into shelter, and maintain public order.

• **Provide on-site addiction, mental health, and medical services.** Seattle and King County currently spend nearly $460 million a year

on addiction and mental health services,[69] plus another $119 million a year on medical services specifically for the homeless.[70] This is more than enough money to provide basic services for all of the homeless men and women who want them. With a secure emergency shelter for up to 2,500 people, the county and city governments can reroute existing resources and "flood the zone" with on-site treatment options for the homeless. For addiction services, we should prioritize recovery programs and terminate policies like safe injection sites that create a "magnet effect" and do not lead to decreases in addiction.

• **Break up the homeless-industrial complex.** Last year, Interim Mayor Tim Burgess took a good first step in rebidding city contracts and cutting funding for corrupt organizations like SHARE.[71] Mayor Durkan must build on this success, reform the system of perverse incentives, and institute a policy of accountability for all organizations which receive taxpayer funds. We must set clear expectations, incentivize outcomes over the quantity of services rendered, and taper off funding as the crisis subsides, not simply continue to spend hundreds of millions of dollars into a system that does not work.

• **Lobby for a policy of "reinstitutionalization" for the dangerously mentally ill.** There is a growing consensus that our fifty year experiment with deinstitutionalization has failed, leaving Americans with serious conditions like schizophrenia to fend for themselves and sometimes ending up in the streets. The mayor should lobby the state legislature and governor to build on positive reforms like emergency involuntary commitment[72] and opening new psychiatric beds in local communities.[73] We must go one step further and consider involuntary commitment for the gravely mentally ill, including some of the street homeless, who present a danger to themselves or others and have no capacity to take care of themselves. The breakdown of Western State Hospital and the loss of federal funds is a state problem, but also a crucial component of addressing the local homelessness crisis in Seattle.

• **Build more market-rate housing through zoning and land use reform.** While homelessness is not caused by rising rents alone, the city must do more to make housing more affordable for people at all income levels. Rather than focus on subsidized housing, which is slow and cost-prohibitive, the city should increase the supply of housing by simplifying its 700-page building code, upzoning urban neighborhoods to increase density, streamlining permits for accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and lobbying for changes to the county's Growth Management Act and the state's condo liability laws. The city should focus on creating a new tier of market-rate housing — including apartments, ADUs, and SRO-style boarding houses — that is affordable for residents below the median income.

Ultimately, the success or failure of local government is a back-to-basics proposition: are the streets clean? Are the neighborhoods safe? Are people able to live, work, and raise their families in a healthy environment? We have the resources and manpower to contain the homelessness crisis — the real question is whether or not our leaders have the political courage to act on it.

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