



City of Tacoma

City Council

August 13, 2024

Bruce Dammeier
Pierce County Executive
1501 Market Street, Suite 100
Tacoma, WA 98402

Dear Executive Dammeier,

As members of the Tacoma City Council, we are writing to express our growing concern over the escalating issue of homelessness impacting our city, other cities and the unincorporated areas of Pierce County. While we recognize and appreciate the work you have done to support sheltering and resources in Tacoma over the years, additional action from the county to prevent the burden from disproportionately continuing to fall on our city alone is required.

According to the 2024 Pierce County Point-In-Time Count, nearly 30 percent of homeless people counted were found to be sleeping unsheltered with the overall number of unsheltered homeless individuals increased 59.4 percent between 2023 and 2024. Tragically, between January 2022 and July 2023, 158 people died while living unsheltered in Pierce County, clearly indicating a growing emergency that requires county-wide solutions.

Our city has made significant strides in providing comprehensive services to individuals experiencing homelessness, including shelter, healthcare, employment assistance, and mental health support. However, as our programs have expanded, it has become increasingly clear that our efforts alone are insufficient to address the broader regional crisis. Many individuals experiencing homelessness are either residing or seeking refuge in unincorporated areas, where access to essential services and shelter is extremely limited.

We know that keeping residents in their own communities and near their support networks, and providing services there leads to better outcomes for them. The absence of adequate County-supported services in these areas not only exacerbates the issue but also places an undue strain on our city resources as we strive to accommodate the growing needs of our houseless neighbors.

We continue to face an emergency on homelessness that we know Pierce County is committed to addressing with us, but we need more sheltering capacity in communities beyond the Tacoma city limits. Already the City of Tacoma provides over 80% of all sheltering in Pierce County, and a similar share of services. There is an opportunity for Pierce County to meet its commitment to provide shelter in the unincorporated areas through a tiny home village site in the Spanaway area which has already been acquired but requires a change in Pierce County land use code to move forward. Tacoma has had experience with many successfully operating tiny home sites, and we would love to share our insights, best practices, and the successes in Tacoma from these styles of non-congregate shelters. Our hope is you can learn from our efforts and join us in meeting the demand to address homelessness.

Our non-congregate, or Tiny Home Village sites, shelter locations currently house over 220 people and see a 36% exit to permanent housing. This is high compared to other sheltering models due to the wrap-around services and ability to have a place for residents to secure their belongings so that they can pursue opportunities to help them further stabilize such as work readiness programs, mental health and substance abuse counseling.

While using substances is not allowed at these sites, stabilization in this kind of environment has allowed clients to manage addiction to alcohol and other substances, has resulted in them finding permanent housing and, in some cases, has seen them return to these sites to serve as mentor and peer-counselor to others struggling with similar issues.

The responsibility of addressing homelessness cannot rest solely on the shoulders of Tacoma. It is imperative that Pierce County steps up to provide the necessary support and resources in unincorporated areas. An important first step is passing ordinance O2024-540, which would allow the county to streamline the process of setting up the type of temporary stability sites mentioned above to quickly meet the needs of this growing emergency. By doing so, we can alleviate the pressure on our city, create a more equitable and sustainable solution for all, and most importantly, save lives of people living unsheltered across Pierce County.

We believe that through continued collaboration and shared commitment, we can make significant progress in reducing homelessness and improving the quality of life for all residents of Pierce County. We appreciate our partnerships thus far and your acknowledgement of the growing crisis.

We look forward to our sustained partnership on this issue, and the outcomes of the critical decisions before you.

Sincerely,

[Council Signatures to be added pending adoption]

CC: Pierce County Council

DRAFT



City of Tacoma

City Council

August 13, 2024

Pierce County Council
930 Tacoma Ave. S.
10th Floor, Rm 1046
Tacoma, WA 98402

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