

December 4, 2020

The Honorable Armondo Pavone  
Mayor, City of Renton  
1055 South Grady Way  
Renton, WA 98057

Renton City Council  
Renton City Hall  
1055 South Grady Way  
Renton, WA 98057

Dear Mayor Pavone and Councilmembers:

As the co-chairs of the King County Regional Homelessness Authority's (RHA) Implementation Board, we write to you concerning Renton's recent proposal of an emergency ordinance regarding the Red Lion Inn.

We appreciate Renton's efforts to address homelessness and value the city's unique challenges, needs, and priorities. Renton is not alone in this effort, and the KCHRA Implementation Board takes seriously our charge not only to elevate best practices, but also to advise and support communities throughout the county.

Through the Interlocal Agreement, the RHA is charged with "significantly decreas[ing] the incidence of homelessness throughout King County, using equity and social justice principles." The KCRHA's guiding principles include reducing disproportionate impacts on vulnerable subpopulations within our region's overall homeless population, such as those individuals with disabilities served by DESC at the Red Lion Inn. We are also mandated to "adopt an evidence-based, housing first orientation" as we inform and support regional efforts to improve the response to homelessness.

King County's homelessness crisis faces unprecedented challenges in the context of this surging pandemic. People who suffer from unsheltered chronic homelessness are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Due to high mobility, exposure to environmental stressors, lack of hygienic supports, and predisposition to co-morbidities such as respiratory problems and pulmonary disease, chronically homeless individuals are susceptible to COVID-19: studies show they are twice as likely to be hospitalized, 2-4 times more likely to require critical care, and 3 times more likely to die than members of the general population. Such numbers mean elevated risk for all of us.

If our region wants to reduce the impact on our healthcare systems, we must prioritize housing and services that allow chronically homeless people to self-isolate and receive vital support and treatment, such as DESC provides. The *2020 Count Us In* report demonstrates that all areas of our region, including Renton, have neighbors who are experiencing homelessness. The report shows a 20% increase in the Southwest King County for neighbors who are living unsheltered. Shelter deintensification efforts, such as those occurring at the Renton Red Lion Inn, impact our region's collective health. A recent University of Washington study shows how converting hotels into emergency shelter as part of COVID-19 response has limited the spread of coronavirus. This study finds the county's deintensification efforts successfully prevented many COVID-19-related deaths and ensured better outcomes for residents of such housing than congregate shelter models.

In addition to reviewing the study results and other literature showing the benefits of DESC's services for chronically homeless individuals, the Implementation Board reviewed video of the Renton City Council meeting to discuss the proposed emergency ordinance on November 23, 2020. We also hosted public comment at the Implementation Board meeting on December 2, 2020. We heard from physicians on staff at the Red Lion about the transformative effects that housing provides to its residents with disabilities. We also heard many concerns about the impact of Renton's proposed ordinance regarding its impact, not only on DESC and their clients at the Red Lion Inn, but also its potentially chilling effect on the ability of organizations to create and operate services to serve those experiencing homelessness in Renton.

We are also keenly aware of the community concerns behind the proposed ordinance. Concerns about public safety, brought frighteningly to life by the recent incident of arson at the hotel by a new resident, are real and must be addressed. Public safety and broad community consent are vital components of a sustainable, effective response to the ongoing homelessness crisis.

Accordingly, we hope you will reconsider the timing, substance, and potential impacts of this proposed ordinance. We believe Renton can successfully adopt regulations, based on existing precedent and evidence-based best practices for housing and collaboration, that both facilitate homeless services and prioritize the mitigation of community impacts.

We seek to facilitate inclusive collaboration and coordination across the county to meet our region's shared homelessness crisis.

We invite you to engage with the Implementation Board so we can better support Renton's needs and interests, as we face these unprecedented challenges together.

As co-chairs, we also offer to meet with you and your staff to learn more about the work that the city is doing to address affordable housing and homelessness and to discuss any opportunities we as a board can be helpful and supportive as partners.

Sincerely,



Nate Caminos  
Co-Chair, Implementation Board  
King County Regional Homelessness Authority



Harold Odom  
Co-Chair, Implementation Board  
King County Regional Homelessness Authority