



October 24, 2023

Re: Municipal plans to abate unhoused people before sufficient shelter space is available

Dear Mayor Bronson,

As winter approaches, the ACLU of Alaska is writing to express deep concerns over the Municipality's approach to homelessness. The record number of outdoor deaths and the fear and frustration of neighbors most impacted by the Municipality's decisions show the unacceptable costs of failing to protect the lives and safety of residents throughout our community.

Ensuring everyone has a safe, stable place to live is crucial to "making homelessness rare, brief and one time to achieve functional zero."¹ The ACLU of Alaska shares the belief that housing is foundational to health, public safety, and economic success. We share the vision that Anchorage should be a place where all residents can access shelter and affordable housing.

However, we are dangerously far from that vision, and the human and financial costs of homelessness continue to mount. As your administration has stated many times, we have limited financial resources to address this crisis.²

¹ <https://aceh.org/anchored-home/>.

² During last week's Housing and Homelessness Committee meeting, municipal officials acknowledged that the need for shelter significantly outstrips capacity. Even as new shelter space becomes available, your administration stated that Anchorage now faces a situation where we need almost double the number of beds than the city planned to make available for winter. Municipal officials have likewise acknowledged that they cannot abate without adequate shelter space. See <https://alaskapublic.org/2023/10/20/hundreds-of-people-are-moving-from-anchorage-homeless-camps-into-hotel-rooms/>.



We are writing today to ask that the allocation of scarce municipal financial and staffing resources be redirected to expand shelter capacity as we simultaneously increase affordable housing. Redirecting scarce resources maximizes benefits and humane options for people experiencing homelessness and minimizes the impact on neighborhoods and residents most directly experiencing the impacts of the lack of available shelter space.

First, until adequate shelter is available, **we ask that the Municipality remove the abatement notices it has already posted and cease posting new abatement notices.** Abatements, by definition, are disruptive and difficult for people with minimal resources. Property is inevitably lost or destroyed. People are often unable to relocate with their belongings for logistical reasons. Abatements result in lost access to tents, blankets, sleeping bags, tarps, and other essential survival gear. Even simply posting abatement notices creates fear and uncertainty for people. Now is not the time to take actions that will separate people from life-saving belongings and force them to find another place where they can be safe until a shelter bed opens up. To do so is unconstitutional, and as temperatures drop, it is even more cruel and inhumane.

Second, **we ask the Municipality to identify how planned abatements will affect neighborhoods across Anchorage.** Without sufficient shelter space, abatements and abatement notices will scatter people all over town, making it harder to continue outreach and connect people to shelter. The impacts on our neighborhoods are severe. Communities lack adequate resources to help support their new neighbors or to handle the public safety concerns that arise in crisis situations as we see in our city today. We are concerned about the extent of outreach and consultation between city officials and these communities when determining when and where to abate. We request that you halt abatements until meaningful community consultations with impacted residents throughout the city can occur.

To reiterate, we request that the Municipality halt current abatement plans and reallocate the financial resources it would have spent on abatements to create additional quality shelter space instead and provide supportive resources to



transition people into housing. We additionally ask that the Municipality engage in meaningful consultation to identify ways to lessen the impact on neighborhoods throughout our community that are most severely affected by this escalating humanitarian crisis.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss further ways to solve this crisis. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mara Kimmel".

Mara Kimmel
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruth Botstein".

Ruth Botstein
Legal Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Garvey".

Michael Garvey
Advocacy Director

- CC. Municipal Assembly members
Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness
Municipality of Anchorage Dept. of Law (Anne Helzer)
Municipality of Anchorage Dept. of Health (Alexis Johnson)
Municipality of Anchorage Dept. of Parks and Recreation (Mike Braniff)
Municipality of Anchorage Police Department (Michael Kerle)