



by email

October 2, 2023

Dear Mayor Aragon, Deputy Mayor Schilling, and City Manager Bailon ~

My colleagues and I were deeply disheartened but not surprised to watch the Burien City Council vote 4-3 last Monday (October 25, 2023) to adopt Ordinance 818. This ordinance will, as many have noted, do nothing to advance effective solutions to help Burien residents without homes or shelter. Adopting this ordinance will cause additional hardship and distress to people living in difficult circumstances, and make them subject to criminal penalties or threat of imposition of such penalties.

The city of Burien's web site states clearly and factually:

“Across the Puget Sound region, people are struggling to keep up with the rapidly rising cost of housing and living expenses and many of our fellow community members are ending up homeless. Our current systems of care do not keep up with the need, and without enough affordable housing, many seniors, families, and individuals end up sleeping on the street and in vehicles.”

Elsewhere, the web site accurately describes the lack of available shelter in Burien:

“It is important to acknowledge the deficits in shelter services here in Burien. While there are some beds for individuals and families, there are not designated spaces for single men, youth, or couples to find shelter. The beds that are available are continually full and shelters have to turn people away because they are over capacity. The need far exceeds the available resources.”

Ordinance 818 seems to have been crafted without recognition of these facts, and without understanding of how the lack of adequate shelter in Burien, south King County, and our region constrains the work of even the most skilled service providers. People in King County do not have access to shelter based on requesting or needing it. . In adopting an ordinance that will create additional criminal penalties for people who by definition have no access to private spaces or public shelter, the city of Burien is putting its unsheltered residents in an impossible situation, requiring them to forgo rest and sleep and to leave their

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community in order to avoid punishment for having nowhere to live. A law that banishes people from being present in public spaces, and punishes possession of gear used to keep warm, eat, or sleep, is designed to threaten people and encourage them to leave the city proper. This approach undermines the notion of shared responsibility within and among King County jurisdictions and across levels of government to offer legitimate assistance to citizens and residents in need.

Coalition members and allied organizations that serve people in Burien and neighboring jurisdictions have asked us for information and assistance to try to determine how they can best assist and advise people who will be directly or indirectly affected by Ordinance 818. I write today to ask you to please share your plans for how you intend to implement this ordinance. Specifically, we would like to know:

- Who will enforce the ordinance? How will it be enforced?
- Who will determine whether, where, and what type of shelter is available, and how? How will this information be communicated, when, and to whom?
- How will information about the ordinance be shared, and with whom?
- Where does the city of Burien expect people who are affected by or notified about this ordinance to go?
- Has the city of Burien made any arrangements with neighboring jurisdictions to accommodate Burien residents who may relocate as this ordinance is implemented?
- Has the city of Burien made any arrangements with shelter or housing providers to offer shelter or housing to Burien residents who are affected by this ordinance?

Given the implementation date of November 1, 2023, we would appreciate a response at your earliest convenience, and within five business days. Thank you.

Sincerely,

{signed}

Alison Eisinger

Executive Director

cc: Councilmember Hugo Garcia; Councilmember Jimmy Matta; Councilmember Cydney Moore;
Councilmember Sarah Moore; Councilmember Stephanie Mora; City Attorney Garmon Newsome II;
Chief Ted Boe