

June 12, 2020

Mayor Jenny Durkan
City of Seattle

Chief Carmen Best
Seattle Police Department

Dear Mayor Durkan and Chief Best,

As advocates to end youth and young adult homelessness, we have witnessed the interconnection between the homeless and justice systems. We have seen how young Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) disproportionately experience homelessness and are disproportionately involved with police and the justice system due to discriminatory, biased policing.

When the community rose to protest the murder of George Floyd at the hands of the police and clamor for an end to police violence, young BIPOC who have experienced homelessness were naturally present since these issues have deeply touched their lives. Each of them is a member of our community, and as such deserves to be heard by our City's leadership.

We are deeply disappointed by the protest response we have seen from the Mayor's Office and the Seattle Police Department starting on Friday, May 29 and onward. The City responded to the community's demands for an end to police brutality with violence from the police, and the Mayor's statements held property in higher regard than human life. We saw the indiscriminate use of rubber bullets by the police, and despite assurances that the curfew would not impact people experiencing homelessness, we saw police using tear gas and forcing them from the area even when they do not have anywhere else to go. And we heard the Mayor denounce the destruction of property rather than acknowledging the deficiencies of current policing practices and pledging to change.

This City is not the buildings and the businesses that line the streets. This City is its people. When the people rise up to denounce injustice, we need our leaders to hear our cries and pave the way for change. The solutions we need to end youth and young adult homelessness and to end violent policing are intertwined, and they begin with greater investment in community-based resources that the community can trust. For this vision to become reality, we need deep changes within the Seattle Police Department and Mayor's Office. We believe that these are the first steps to realize this vision:

1. Eliminate militarized police presence at protests

Immediately meeting BIPOC who are gathering to protest police brutality with a militarized, adversarial police presence is in itself an escalation tactic by the police and City leaders. When police cover their badge numbers and behave aggressively, the community rightfully feels threatened because the situation mirrors their past experiences with police violence. The Mayor's Office must eliminate militarized police presence at protests.

2. Do not prosecute any protestors who have been arrested

Protestors were exercising their right to stand against injustice and were met by an adversarial police presence. No one should be prosecuted for raising their voice against police brutality and systemic racism.

3. Change the rhetoric and actions coming from the Mayor's Office

While the community was mourning the loss of Black lives and demanding change, Mayor Durkan's address to the public focused on the loss of property. Instead of actively creating channels to work with constituents toward change, Mayor Durkan's first reaction was to call for a curfew and increased police presence. We need to hear the Mayor acknowledge that the community's grievances are real and justified and to address the well-being of the community after the police created an aggressive environment at protests. We are pleased with the Mayor's decision to meet with protest organizers to begin developing a community-based plan to end police violence, and we will hold the Mayor accountable to following through with these promises.

4. Hold police accountable

The Mayor's Office and Seattle Police Department must root out the aspects of police culture that lead to police brutality and the over-policing of BIPOC. Any officers who are enabling a culture that allows for police brutality and discriminatory policing to take hold must be removed from the force.

5. Defund militarized police and invest in community-based solutions to end homelessness

Our communities do not need more policing. Instead, our communities need resources that can help them flourish, like supports to end youth and young adult homelessness. We support community demands to reduce Seattle Police Department budget by 50% and to reallocate these funds into community-based solutions. The City can reaffirm their commitment to ending homelessness by investing part of these resources into diversionary and therapeutic approaches to end youth and young adult homelessness. Any policy or effort to end homelessness or violent policing must be rooted in racial equity.

We urge you to take these actions and show a true commitment to end violent policing to all people in Seattle, and especially to BIPOC who are disproportionately impacted. These actions can pave the way for system transformation that will contribute to ending violent policing and homelessness.

Sincerely,

A Way Home Washington

City of Seattle Human Rights Commission
Homelessness Taskforce

Center for Children & Youth Justice

Erin L. Lovell, Executive Director, Legal Counsel
for Youth and Children

Mason County HOST Program

Melanie Lewis Dickerson, Community Solutions

Partners for Our Children

Rian Watt, Community Solutions

The Mockingbird Society

The WA Alliance for Children and Families

Washington Host Home Coalition

Washington Low Income Housing Alliance

YouthCare