

Subject: Concerns Regarding Proposed Buffer Zone, City Camping Ordinance

Dear Members of the Missoula City Council,

We are writing to you as dedicated community service providers who serve individuals who are unhoused and unsheltered in Missoula. We recognize the challenges and concerns associated with having people who are houseless living on our streets and in our parks. However, until a comprehensive solution is found, it is crucial that our policies are inclusive and serve all Missoulians effectively.

Our intention is to collaborate with you, local businesses, and community members to address these complex issues. In this spirit, we wish to express our concerns regarding the current buffer zone ordinance being proposed.

One specific aspect that deeply concerns us is the requirement for individuals who are camping to dismantle their camps every morning by 8 am and not return until 8 pm that night. This stipulation will be detrimental to individuals striving for stability. It hinders their ability to apply for jobs or maintain employment, attend necessary medical appointments, and even access basic amenities. The visibility of carrying all their belongings throughout the day not only stigmatizes them but also restricts their access to facilities that prohibit large bags, such as convenience stores.

Additionally, the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) and the Community Care Team (CCT) operate during the day, precisely when these individuals will be forced to be mobile, making it challenging to provide consistent support. We urge you to reconsider this stipulation and, if a time limit is necessary, revert to the three-day limit proposed in last year's draft ordinance.

We ask you to consider sending this ordinance back to committee. This would provide an opportunity to refine the proposal and ensure it effectively addresses the needs of all parties involved. If this is not feasible, we propose adding a sunset clause to the ordinance, allowing for its reevaluation in the fall. This would enable adjustments to be made based on its actual impact before the next summer.

We have heard suggestions that individuals should relocate to Johnson Street as a solution. However, this is not a viable option for everyone. Some individuals cannot use the Johnson Street shelter or the Poverello Center due to personal circumstances or the inability to adapt to a congregate shelter environment. The HOT team estimates that approximately 150 individuals are currently living outside,

and Johnson Street does not have the capacity to accommodate this influx. The existing facilities are already stretched, with over 100 individuals sleeping there each night on mats on the concrete floor.

This ordinance, if passed, will become a permanent part of the City's code. While we are assured that enforcement will be lenient and not criminalize those living outside, we are concerned about the future interpretation and enforcement of this ordinance. What happens when the current City staff, Mayor, and council members are no longer in office? The ordinance will remain and could be enforced in ways that may not align with the current intentions.

We urge you to consider these points seriously and work towards a solution that supports the well-being and dignity of all Missoulians.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Jill Bonny
Executive Director
The Poverello Center

Jim Hicks
Executive Director
Hope Rescue Mission

Lara Salazar
CEO
Partnership Health Center

Rebecca Ramos
Executive Director
Open Aid Alliance

Jen Euell
Executive Director
Missoula YWCA

Amy Allison Thompson
Executive Director
Missoula Food Bank and
Community Center

Slaven Lee
Executive Director
Missoula Public Library