

January 9th 2022

Dear Denver City Council,

We the undersigned are writing to ask for the City Council to take action to solidify policy for Denver to protect the lives of houseless people by preventing sweeps of houseless people and their property when it is under freezing. Denver must activate emergency cold weather response by opening warming centers and halting sweeps any time it is under 32 degrees. The current standard of 10 degrees or 6 inches of snow is unconscionable!! No one should have their property taken and be left with nothing or be forced to move all their belongings when it is under freezing.

Medical professionals state that the risk of hypothermia is present anywhere under 32 degrees. If it is wet that risk goes up even more. Frostbite leads to lost limbs. People who are elderly, sick, disabled, or otherwise not in full health are even more affected by cold temperatures. Losing property to stay warm in a sweep and then being on the streets with nothing can be deadly.

Houseless people are being prevented from going inside in the freezing cold to get warm because they have to stay out to keep the City from taking all their property in a sweep. When people do go inside, they lose all their property when they get out. This does not help people get inside to be warm and it leaves people out in the streets in the cold with nothing.

When sweeps are conducted in freezing weather, this process itself is dangerous and traumatizing. Houseless people are forced to pack all their belongings in the cold and snow, often getting themselves and their property wet, dragging property long distances in the cold. When someone is sick or disabled this process is even worse. People are already often dehydrated, malnourished, sleep deprived dealing with stress, trauma, anxiety, mental health and physical health challenges. The stress of moving is bad enough without facing freezing temperatures and wet snow.

Warming Centers at Recreation Centers should be open in all freezing weather and sweeps should be canceled so that houseless people can safely access those warming centers without fear of losing all of their property.

After showing the current standard is not based on medical reasoning, DDPHE has said they will "revisit" this standard, However even if they do set a new standard this does not ensure that standard is followed. Last winter the City canceled some sweeps in cold weather, but conducted others in weather as cold as 4 degrees. We cannot count on verbal commitments from City departments to not conduct sweeps in extreme cold.

Policy needs to be set in place to ensure a safe standard is followed regarding cold weather response, including the policy for halting sweeps of houseless people's property in cold weather. City Council's job is to set policies for our City and this is a critical policy to set for the safety of our community.

Please take action to protect the lives of houseless people in our community.

Sincerely,

9to5 Colorado  
American Civil Liberties Union, Colorado  
American Friends Service Committee  
Atlantis Community  
Bayaud Enterprises

Be-Konnected: The Housing Connection  
Bring Our Neighbors Home  
Buck Foundation  
Clergy for Freedom and Justice and Family Advocacy and Crisis Education Intervention Team  
Colfax Cats  
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless  
Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition  
Colorado Poverty Law Project  
Denver-Aurora Community Action Committee  
Denver Catholic Worker  
Denver Democratic Socialists of America  
Denver Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety  
Dry Bones Denver  
Elevated Denver  
Empowerment Program  
Friends of SODen  
Growing Home  
Harm Reduction Action Center  
Headwaters Protectors  
Housekeys Action Network Denver  
Janet's Kitchen  
Mutual Aid Monday  
National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty  
New Covenant Alpha And Omega Church  
Occupy Denver  
Reciprocity Collective  
Redress Movement  
Romero Theater Troupe  
Seasoned with Grace Unboxed  
Spring Institute  
Swing By Street Supply  
Together Colorado  
Warm Cookies of the Revolution