

# Immediate Actions for Incoming Denver Mayor Re: Houselessness – No Money Needed

The following is a list of actions that take no money you can take as Mayor immediately upon entering office. We will also send a list of actions that do take money later, but we want to give you this list to start with as they can be done right away.

It is necessary to make it clear to begin with that all Sweeps and Camping Ban enforcement should be ended entirely. Pushing houseless people around our city, taking people's only property, putting people in jail, and otherwise terrorizing people trying to survive is inhumane, unconstitutional, costly, and ineffective. It needs to end. We are not asking for sweeps to stop just because we don't like them. We are asking Traumatic Displacements to stop because they are harming people and causing compounded trauma. They are hurting people and work in direct opposition to everything the CITY, HOST and their partner agencies say they are trying to do. They are causing injury (State Sponsored Injury) to a large segment of the community. Community members and Advocates have the ideas on what is needed and we need to listen to them and let them lead the way.

Instead of sweeping visible houseless people from block to block, sanitation resources and support should be provided where people are at. Sweeps should be transformed into actual cleaning that does not displace people or trash vital property. This can happen immediately.

And instead of treating houselessness as something to be criminalized, controlled, and hid, the City should treat houselessness as a system problem in a profit driven housing market and take responsibility to create the housing everyone needs.

Some of the actions listed below, unfortunately, are starting from the assumption that you are not going to end the sweeps and camping ban enforcement. As long as this enforcement against survival continues, our community will suffer. Knowing what you said on the campaign trail about enforcing the camping ban, there is concern you will continue with camping ban enforcement and sweeps. The list below are actions you can take to at least reduce the harm on our community inflicted by anti-survival enforcement.

We are more than happy to go into further detail on any one of these points. This is just a reference list which can be further elaborated in order to effectively follow these steps. Please turn to us for assistance in implementing these actions.

## **Streets -**

(The first 11 actions here come from Swept to Nowhere <https://denverhomelessoutloud.org/swept-to-nowhere/> which is a 2019 report from a survey with 150 houseless people living outside. See the report to read more detail on each of these action items.)

- Placement of Posting - Ensure sweeps notices are posted visibly along fences, on tents, and handed to individuals to help spread awareness of posted sweeps dates.
- Reposting - If a sweep is posted for a particular day and then canceled due to whatever reason, if the sweep is still going to happen, ensure it is reposted for another 7 day notice before conducting (as should be in line with lawsuit requirements).
- 48-Hour Notices Should Be 7-Day - End the arbitrary practice of treating some camps as "small" giving them only 48 hours notice, when they are just as big as other camps that get 7 days notice. 48 hours notices are not enforced at 48 hours leaving people unprepared for the sweep and losing all their property. Camps also grow in the time posted, making them later fit for 7 days. The inconsistency of these practices causes great harm. As a rule all encampments should be given the required 7 days notice.

- Halt Sweeps during Inclement Weather - Sweeps have been conducted in weather as cold as 4 degrees. DDPHE had a policy to not sweeps under 10 degrees (which they did not even follow) and now, after pressure, they have “temporarily” raised it to 20 degrees - which is still too cold to sweep. Frostbite cases went off the charts this last winter. Many people died on the streets due to the cold last winter alone. Taking people’s property in sweeps and forcing people to remain outside to watch their property not be taken in a sweep puts the community at great risk. Sweeps should not be conducted under 32 degrees.
- Camping Ban, Notice Right - Any enforcement of the camping ban should also include the same 48 hour or 7 day notice right one has for their property. Using the camping ban to get around notice requirements leads to massive instability and harm on the houseless community and leads to lawsuit violations as people are forced to move with no notice and then their property is taken in the process.
- Fencing Removed at Sweeps - Since 2020 the City has been putting up massive fences around the area being swept during sweeps. This practice makes moving support for camp residents extremely difficult, is traumatizing for camp residents, causes ADA issues, and costs the City a large amount of money that could be spent on useful things.
- Disposal of Needles and HazardousWaste - City and contracted workers have a practice of trashing a person’s entire tent and all that is in it if any needles or anything deemed as hazardous waste is found in it. This results in people losing all of their property, including vital documents, winter protection, and everything. Needles and hazardous waste should be disposed of properly and the tent and other property left to the owner or stored.
- Storage Awareness - Information about the location and hours of the storage facility should be posted at day centers, shelters, and libraries. The website discussed with the City for sweeps information, should be created and kept up with information with the location property was taken and when it was stored.
- Storage Hours - The current hours are not working for houseless people to access storage. Hours should be extended to full day hours. To do this without extending hours of expensive contracted EHS staff and off duty police, and at the same time solving other problems with the use of these workers at the storage facility, the facility could be joined with the current storage locker facility and the same staff (or others if needed) could manage this facility.
- Storage Number - A direct number for the storage facility should be provided as staff at 311 cannot answer questions about property stored and storage access. This should also be posted on the storage building, along with hours of operation.
- Language Used (Clean-up vs. Sweep) - The Cities use of the term “Clean-up” instead of “Sweep” is misleading and causes confusion on the streets as houseless people are told there is a clean up, but then in that their home is taken and trashed. The City should use more accurate language like “sweep” or “traumatic displacement” to accurately describe what is happening.

(The following actions were not listed in the 2019 report)

- Camping Ban Repeal - Commit to not vetoing any vote from Council to repeal the Camping Ban.
- No Camping Ban Enforcement - Do not give any directives to the Police Department to enforce the camping ban as a practice.
- End sweeps on Saturdays - This is a new practice that needs to end. Everyone - houseless people, workers, advocates - need a weekend off.
- Sweep Start Time - Sweeps currently start at 5am. This causes sleep deprivation for houseless people who may not get to sleep until late at night due to the cause of the streets. The sweep start time should be moved to later in the morning - around 8am and 9am.
- Outreach Support at Sweeps - Currently the only outreach scheduled at sweeps are two substance use navigation teams. Expand this outreach to include mental health & behavioral health clinicians. Funding is earmarked for this through HOST and they have been unable to implement. Ensure HOST outreach team and other contracted outreach teams are present at sweeps when DOTI shows up, not when the sweep is ending. This will also be made easier by a later start time.
- Training for Crew - Require trauma-informed care training and legal compliance training for all DOTI employees working sweeps.

- Fire Ralph Gashler of DOTI or remove him from sweeps crew - He has been leading the sweeps crew for years and has serious violations of rights, trust, unprofessional behavior, and incidents that should not be tolerated in his position.
- City Council Sweeps notices - Ensure consistent communication to city council with sweeps notices. This is sweep notifications, it's public information and should be available to the public as well. The unhoused often asks for this information.
- Change practice of taking "un-occupied" tents - Currently tents are taken without any confirmation of the owning being present to claim the tent or not. - It should be required that workers ask nearby neighboring residents if they know if the tent is abandoned or not on their first and second pass through the area to confirm it is abandoned before taking a tent.
- End Permanent sweeps zones - The constraints no-notice sweeps in these areas do nothing to "clear out" the areas, and only lead to major instability and harm to people staying in these areas. These areas should be treated like any other area requiring 7 day notice.
- Fencing Removed - Remove fencing blocking sidewalks in houseless service areas (current examples are Samaritan House and Crossroads). These are ADA violations and illegal closure of public property.
- End the "compassionate crackdown" - This is a "campaign" against poor, houseless, and people of color in downtown areas started by Mayor Hancock. It has led to massive arrest rates - in particular in the union station area.
- End the Street Enforcement Team (SET) - This team was created by Mayor Hancock specifically to enforce the camping ban and other laws against houseless people. They run rogue throughout the City chasing houseless around with no or minimal legal oversight. This team should be ended and the money redirected to effective outreach teams. As long as SET is in existence, this team should have Body Worn Cameras (Saldate said they would and this still is not implemented). They also need documented procedures, this team is performing functions outside of their scope of duties.
- No Involuntary Commitment - Squelch all efforts to introduce any form of involuntary commitment of people for mental health or substance related issues or the requirement that they submit to involuntary treatment as a condition of receiving services

#### **Vehicles -**

- End tows of vehicles known to be homes; or at least instruct officers to extend time until vehicle dwellers can move their vehicle without it being impounded
- Build effective outreach into the impound process as intended with the passing of the recent poverty tow bill. Fill the 48-hour 'outreach window' created in this bill with quality outreach that provides bridge services. 54-811 (8)(9)(10)
- Create procedures and enhanced training within DPD, DFD, DSD that reduces the trauma and harm inflicted by these impounds, and promotes safety.
- Develop a method for everyone to be able to retrieve their belongings from impound. Adjust current requirements so people can retrieve, at minimum, basic survival gear and other necessities.
- Increase the time people have to retrieve their belongings and increase the amount of belongings they're allowed to retrieve.
- Develop a method to waive fees for people who are retrieving their homes from impound due to financial hardship.
- Right to Privacy - Ensure compliance with privacy rights to not enter a vehicle without a warrant.

#### **Shelters -**

- Ombudsman - Institute third party reporting and investigation/ombudsman system for shelters.
- Mission Entrance Signs - Post signs on the Mission doors giving clear information about the entrance for all times of day and night.
- Appeals - Increase days for appeals of shelter bans to allow people to return to shelters.

- Late Night Access - Ensure late night shelter access, including bringing back process for work confirmation to allow late night entry.
- Late night evictions - Prohibit late night evictions from shelter to the streets (unless alternative shelter is provided, or unless due to extreme violence).
- Evictions - Overhaul processes related to evictions from shelters including ending the use of the term “DNR”, ending the practice of noting evictions in HMIS, and reevaluating rules used to evict people.
- HIPPA - Review use of HIPPA in shelters including extensive HMIS use violating privacy rights.
- Privacy of Personal Info - Decrease information needed to access shelter/programs including gender and OneHome information.
- Disability Accommodations - require shelters to accommodate people with disabilities and work with disability care providers and advocacy groups to understand how to accommodate people with different disabilities.
- Queer Safe shelter - Identify a hotel or other private room space for a queer-specific non-congregate shelter.

### Hotels -

- Hotel Closures - End any houseless hotel closures unless and until all residents have housing secured and only if the hotel is being transformed into housing these same residents could afford.
  - Immediately this affects the Rodeway Inn - Demand DHA not sell this property but rather use it for low-income and queer friendly housing, pay for bridge housing for all residents until proper permanent housing is secured, meet with Rodeway residents and respond with action to their needs.

### Other -

- Audit City Houselessness Funding - A thorough audit is needed to best understand what money is used effectively, what money is not, and what money may be being used in ways it should not be used. Support Tim O'Brien in expanding his auditing of these services (April 2023 audit). Hold city departments accountable to provide the documentation necessary to perform accurate audits.
- Ensure nationwide search for new heads of HOST, DOTI, DDPHE, and Public Safety - Hancock appointed career department people to head agencies. They were beholden to the Mayor and did not question, challenge and innovate. We need agency head appointees. who have done innovative, imaginative and creative things that have shown results.
- Direct Access to Government - 311 and [pocket.gov](https://pocket.denvergov.org) are designed to limit direct access to our government. People should be able to access city government without going to 311 or [pocket.gov](https://pocket.denvergov.org). When they go to the Webb Building, the doors at agency departments should not be locked.

Sincerely,  
 Housekeys Action Network Denver  
 Mutual Aid Money  
 Friends of South Denver



*Friends of SoDen*