

October 7, 2023

Dear Mayor Mike Johnston,

When you first declared the Houseless State of Emergency we were cautiously hopeful that this would lead to some relief from constant traumatic displacements, some resources for houseless people living on our streets, and that it would lead to real housing for houseless people most in need. Instead all the promises you made at the beginning of your term have been broken.

Houseless people are being swept from block to block every day with no notice, no sanitation resources, and no housing. At the beginning of your time in office you stated publicly that ***moving people along, only to set up tents on another block, was pointless and potentially dangerous, and that you would strive to let people stay put until you have somewhere safer for them to move to.*** So much for that promise... Now you are sweeping houseless people every day. The so called "soft sweeps" are even worse than "hard sweeps" as they give people no notice, no advocate or outreach worker support, and terrorize people constantly. Houseless people at large camp sweeps are crying to us asking where is the housing they were promised.

Your "House" 1000 initiative includes no actual housing - hotels run like halfway houses, micro units with no bathroom, even congregate shelters are being called housing, and most insantly you are counting people as "housed" who stay in these places for only 2 weeks. This is shelter not housing. To have a lasting impact on ending homelessness (as you claim to be trying to do) you cannot put someone up in a hotel for a few weeks or months, and then they land right back on the streets. Instead of working to end homelessness, this just gives an illusion of doing something and then keeps us in the same position with no housing and people suffering on the streets and in the shelters.

You have said you believe in Housing First, but the first hotel being used as part of the "House" 1000 initiative has rules exactly like a halfway house - no guests, no alcohol or drugs, daily check ins, no notice room checks, ect. These sites need transparency and accountability for how they are run. We ask for some specific methods and actions to oversee these sites and improve the stability and quality of life for the residents.

At the same time as you are offering hotel or micro units to some residents at some select visible encampments, extremely vulnerable sick, elderly, disabled, victims, marginalized individuals (and all families) in shelters, at other encampments not selected, hidden on the streets, in cars, ect are left out of any "house" 1000 opinions. You are offering hotel rooms to people at a visible camps, and then ignoring the desperate need of an elderly person with serious health problems in a shelter who can't care for her health in a shelter or on the streets, or a woman running from a violent abuser who will be found by her abuser at the shelter or on the streets and has no safe place, or countless others who are extremely vulnerable. Hotel or housing options must be opened and prioritized for the most vulnerable people in our City.

As houseless, formerly houseless, and advocates who are on ground with houseless people everyday and know what is going on first hand, we need to meet with you to discuss what is really going on in our community and to demand some minimal vital changes to your "House" 1000 initiative under the Houseless State of Emergency. While we would like to ask for a total overhaul of your initiative, including [these six criteria for housing](#) which we wrote you about a month ago, and including a total end to traumatic displacements, at this moment we are simply asking for these minimal actions for you to uphold your promises regarding sweeps, prioritize vulnerable people, and have accountability for sites where houseless people are move to live through this initiative. If you will not take these minimal actions as part of your "House" 1000 initiative, we cannot support the State of Emergency being renewed and will ask City Council to vote NO on renewing unless these changes are made. In order to ensure there is time for you to discuss these proposals with us and make changes prior to the City Council vote on renewal on October 16th, we need to meet with you before October

11th. We ask that you schedule a meeting with us to discuss these issues no later than October 11th. See our list of specific minimal demands below regarding the State of Emergency.

When you first came into office you told us you wanted to hear our advice and have regular communication on the plans. Well, after ignoring our advice for the past two months, we hope you will remember what you told us when you first came into office and at least meet with us and heed our small demands for some level of relief on the streets and standards for housing.

Sincerely,

Housekeys Action Network Denver
Mutual Aid Money
Friends of SoDen
Helping Hands for Dignity
Individual Houseless Advocates

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Demands for Mayor's Houseless State of Emergency "House" 1000 plan

Follow Your Sweeps Promises –

Follow your promise to only sweep people to nowhere if the encampment has a public health and safety risk, is obstructing the right of way, or is on private property.

Furthermore, follow your promises to provide 7 day notice for all such sweeps, provide an outreach letter, personally visit the encampment, provide trash service (including promise to use trash service as preventative measure before posting a sweep), ensure outreach team housing support, and mental and physical health on site.

All these promises can be found in the "Encampment Cleanup Policy" published by the Mayor's office on August 10th.

Prioritize Vulnerable People –

Prioritize vulnerable houseless people for hotel, tiny home, or housing opportunities, not just people at the most visible encampments.

While all units should be made available to the most vulnerable first, at least set aside some units for the most vulnerable people and create a process for working with providers, advocates, and the houseless community to identify the most extremely vulnerable people and get them these options (if desired).

Only Count Real Housing –

Quit counting people as "housed" who are not in real housing or not there for more than two weeks. The large majority of "housing" being counted is not housing by the federal definition. Housing comes with rights and is permanent. Be honest and call what is being provided shelter if that is what it is. Only count people as "sheltered" if they are still in the shelter at the end of the year when you are supposed to have "housed" (really shelter) 1000 people - 2 weeks does not count.

Create Transparency and Accountability for Non-congregate Shelters (and congregate too) – Hotels, micro-communities, and any places a part of the “house” 1000 initiative must be run with fair rules and processes, enable residents to report and address issues, ensure basic level of support/resources, and hold providers accountable to standards of agreement. The below 8 elements of transparency and accountability must be put in place for all places counted under the “house” (really shelter) 1000 initiative.

Transparency and Accountability for Shelters (non-congregate and congregate)

- 1. A firm reporting line that people can call with concerns and an ombudsman-type structure for follow up of complaints and reports from residents. The ombudsman must be partnered with people with houseless experience as a team in doing investigations and follow up actions.*
- 2. A regular/ongoing resident survey/questionnaire about their experience at the hotel/micro/tiny shelter site*
- 3. Audits and inspections of the shelter sites, including talking with residents, including outside formerly houseless people in the inspections, and publicizing the results. This must also include assessment of proof of trauma training for staff.*
- 4. A review and overhaul of the rules/regulations i.e. daily check-in, weekly room checks, no guests, and other rules that run contrary to housing first.*
- 5. An arbitration and mediation committee independent of site operators for residents to appeal to if they believe that they were wrongfully discharged.*
- 6. Minimum standard for food service and quality, with assessment by a professional nutritionist.*
- 7. A whistleblower hotline for shelter staff to report issues they see.*
- 8. Regular reporting to City of numbers of people “exited” and why, resident demographics, any rule changes, ect to be made public.*

Provide Written Statement on Plan for Jail Units –

Many different things have been said about your plans to renovate units in the jail and use them for substance and behavioral health treatment. It was stated at the Homeless Advisory Meeting by your staff that your administration plans to conduct a 'renovation of the courts' to create the means to have individuals remanded to the Denver jail for involuntary treatment. These plans are extremely concerning - sounding like plans to use jail as a treatment facility for houseless people. We have serious concerns about violations of human rights and about the well being of people in jail treatment. We would like to see a detailed written description of what you plan is with these jail units and treatment.