

Dear Comrades, Councilors, and friends.

I would like to take a few moments of your time to tell you a little bit about my experience being homeless, the downward spiral I experienced, and why no one in this city should have to experience this. Parts of my story are violent and difficult, but I think it is important to share them to help you understand what criminalization of homelessness does.

It was winter when I wore out my welcome at my friends house. With all my belongings in my bag I needed to find a place to sleep. It was -26 degrees, a cold night. My clothing wet, frozen against my skin. I needed to get out of the wind. Since I could not find a stairwell in a building to sleep in, I decided to sleep in a parking garage at Eby and Charles. Waking up a few hours later by a security guard shining a flashlight in my face and kicking me in the stomach. He told me it was private property and he demanded that I let him search my pockets and bags or he would use as much force as he thought necessary until the police came. I told him he could call the cops all he wants but if he touched me or my bag, I would call my lawyer Steve Gale. He slapped me in my face and said if I'm not gone in ten minutes he would kick the shit out of me. Getting up with my feet wet, shoes filled with melting snow and cold, I got out of there as soon as possible. If I was lucky I would find a place at out of the cold, risking a beating and robbing if someone wanted to show how tough they were or wanted to teach me a lesson.

Of all the things, cold hunger, violence, the worst part of being homeless is not having a place to go. A space to call your own. A place to just sit, sleep or relax without fear of police, rent-a-cops or predators beating you or harassing. A place where you can drop your mask and be yourself.

You have already heard and voted on the interim housing measures staff presented to you. I want you know to reread what Mauleek proposed at the last meetings. With these four proposals and the suggestions of the Lived Expertise Working Group, hundreds of people will now have a place to call home.

Imagine it was your child that was passed out in a drug house where the dealer takes advantage of their state and assaults them. I know this happens in this community because it happened to me. I was cold, out of legally prescribed opioids, so I went to someones house. Who when I got there only had what I thought was heroin. I smoked it, passed out and woke up with my pants on my knees.

Or imagine your child having to sleep with some old guy just to have warm place to sleep. Many friends have had this happen.

We know from our networks children and youth who are experiencing this. Who are falling through the cracks and are prey for predators.

We know that people see our homeless friends as predators, as burdens on society. This fuels the othering and criminalization of the poor. When the reality is the opposite. People are profiled into worthy and unworthy poor.

While it is not reflected in current practice, housing is a basic human right, not a privilege. A right is something that people have by virtue of being human. To deny someone a place to live is to deny someone the right to exist.

Squats, encampments, etc. are not created to fight the cities. They are created so people have a safe place to exist. To vote for these proposals is to affirm peoples right to exist. And doing so from a human rights approach will make these measures even better. For example, Are you going to stop the legal action against people in encampments? Can you redirect the money you will save to increase the 3.4 million you are giving staff and agencies? Will you fund civilian response teams immediately, where people can talk to lived experts, people who understand what they've been through? You have said sanction encampments, will you give staff and those with lived experience the power to quickly sanction land for encampments and squatting?

Finally I see that the funding request from SASC was rejected. This was very disappointing. Sexual assault and homelessness are directly connected. Empowering partner agencies, people with lived experience, and peer support workers is a much better approach.

-Julian Ichim