



STATE OF WASHINGTON

## State Advisory Council on Homelessness (SACH)

October 23, 2018

The Honorable Jay Inslee  
Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0002

Re: Recommendations for Reducing DOC Exits to Homelessness

Dear Governor Inslee:

On behalf of the State Advisory Council on Homelessness (SACH), I am pleased to enclose recommendations on reducing homelessness for people re-entering Washington state communities from incarceration. The SACH researched and developed these recommendations, in coordination with the Reentry Council, to assist you and your staff as you consider legislation and policies regarding people exiting the Department of Corrections facilities into homelessness.

The SACH is deeply concerned with the high barriers to housing experienced by those re-entering communities from incarceration. A 2013 report prepared for the Washington State Department of Commerce cites data from the Urban Institute indicating that “ex-offenders recently released from prison experience serious challenges to securing stable and permanent housing.” Another recent study for the Gates Foundation found that people with a history of incarceration in Washington State are seven times more likely to experience homelessness.

In addition, there are ongoing prison reform efforts aimed at decreasing mass incarceration which could lead to even greater numbers of people re-entering communities around the state with a need for safe and stable housing.

The 2013 report cited above found that “homeless ex-offenders who received housing assistance and transitioned to permanent housing had lower rates of criminal recidivism, and higher rates of employment, Medicaid coverage, and substance abuse treatment, compared to other homeless ex-offenders.”

Over the last decade, the Earned Release Date (ERD) Housing Voucher Program has been successful in assisting 11,916 people from incarceration to temporary housing – however, many of these people are unable to maintain their housing after the program. For greater success, they need a longer period of time to get back on their feet, rental assistance payments need to be indexed to the rental market, and participants in the ERD program need to be protected under landlord-tenant law. In addition, we need to build on the good work of the ERD Housing Voucher Program and expand the voucher program to increase the number of people successfully transitioning to stable housing rather than homelessness.

In an effort to increase community safety and reduce the costs of recidivism, the SACH is committed to identifying ways to decrease homelessness and housing instability among those with criminal histories re-entering our communities. People being released have served their sentences and deserve the opportunity to contribute to their communities – to do so requires a stable place to live and work.

**Working to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time throughout Washington.**

Kirsten Jewell, Chair  
Kitsap County Human  
Services  
*County Government*

Linda Olsen, Vice Chair  
Washington State  
Coalition Against  
Domestic Violence  
*Non-Profit*

Sheila Babb Anderson  
Campion Advocacy Fund  
*Philanthropic*

Donna Batch  
HUD (retired)  
*Federal Government*

Arthur Castleton  
Universal Cells  
*Youth*

Matt Davis  
City of Spokane  
*City Government*

Jesse Greene  
Seattle Popcorn  
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Susan Olson  
A Part of the Solution  
*Homeless Experience*

Jason Ritterreiser  
HKM Employment  
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*Business*

Melissa Taylor  
Lower Columbia  
Community Action  
Program  
*Non-Profit*

I, or any of the members of the SACH, would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further or to answer questions about these recommendations at your convenience.

Thank you for your leadership to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time for people throughout our state.

Best regards,



Kirsten Jewell

Chair, State Advisory Council on Homelessness



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## State Advisory Council on Homelessness (SACH)

### Recommendations on Re-entry from DOC to Stable Housing

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In Washington State individuals with a history of incarceration are seven times more likely to experience homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Evidence suggests that every dollar spent on the Earned Release Date (ERD) Housing Voucher Program saves the Department of Corrections (DOC), the criminal justice system, and the community \$7 of cost-savings<sup>2</sup>, decreased recidivism rates, and a reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness. To further decrease homelessness among people with a history of incarceration, SACH recommends the following actions regarding the ERD Housing Voucher Program and other programs targeted for people exiting the DOC into homelessness:

#### Changes to the existing Earned Release Date (ERD) Housing Voucher Program:

- 1) Increase the maximum payable benefit for rent assistance in the ERD Housing Voucher Program to be a flexible rate based on Fair Market Rent and extend the rental assistance part of the program to extend at least three months after supervision is complete, or a duration consistent with rental assistance programs.
- 2) Require rent agreements/leases in any DOC sponsored rent assistance program so that both the landlord and the tenant are protected by Landlord Tenant Law.
- 3) Institute *Comprehensive Individualized Reentry Planning* within DOC, including housing stability planning, and support funding for a new *Reentry Navigator/Mentors Program* managed by the Statewide Reentry Council.
- 4) Support passage of Statewide Fair Chance Housing legislation which would expand housing options for people who were formally incarcerated.

#### Changes for inmates not eligible for the ERD Program:

- 5) Ensure that all people who are releasing from prison into homelessness are provided with information about the housing coordinated entry program in the county where they are being released.
- 6) Create an expanded Housing Voucher Program, incorporating the recommendations above, for all people exiting prisons into homeless. Implement this program targeted specifically to the DOC population in coordination with the existing homeless crisis response systems and coordinated entry programs in each county.

#### Additional recommendation

- 7) Affordable Housing programs funded with Washington State grant funds, including the Housing Trust Fund, should include a requirement that owners/operators not be able to discriminate in tenant selection based on prior criminal history.

<sup>1</sup> Cutuli, JJ, *Factors Associated with Adult Homelessness in Washington State*, June 1, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Financial Management, *Review of Policies Relating to the Release and Housing of Sex Offenders in the Community*, 2014.

**Working to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time throughout Washington.**