

Mayor Jenny Durkan
600 4th Avenue, 7th Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Deputy Mayor Tiffany Washington
600 4th Avenue, 7th Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Helen Howell, Interim Director
Human Services Department
700 5th Avenue #500
Seattle, WA 98104

May 20, 2021

Dear Mayor Durkan, Deputy Mayor Washington, and Interim Director Helen Howell,

We write to express our deep concerns about new contract requirements of City-funded outreach providers to participate in the Homelessness Outreach and Provider Ecosystem (HOPE) Team guided encampment removal strategies, a continued gatekeeping of limited shelter resources, and new burdensome reporting requirements.

The additional requirements of the *Contract Package Elements* provided by the Human Services Department (HSD) in April 2021 hinder our ability to provide culturally attuned services to our American Indian and Alaska Native relatives experiencing unsheltered homelessness and place undue administrative strain on our organizations. In a recent meeting with HSD, providers requested the department engage in contract negotiations and were told the contract is non-negotiable. As culturally specific service providers, we are extremely concerned about the racial equity impacts of the decision to change contract terms in the middle of a service period.

Because of these changes, Mother Nation will no longer provide outreach services in coordination with the City of Seattle. Seattle Indian Health Board will not sign this contract in its current form, jeopardizing our ability to provide services to our unsheltered relatives in the near future. Chief Seattle Club has signed the contract because of the immense needs in our community, but will suspend submitting any further invoices to HSD until the issues outlined below are resolved.

Our top concern is to maintain continuity of care for our unsheltered relatives and proposed contract changes will harm our Native relatives experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Our Native-led organizations provide a variety of wrap around culturally specific health and human services including medical care, behavioral health services, housing assistance, employment training, gender-based violence prevention and response, and cultural services and programs to urban Indian community members experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Seattle. We are essential partners in reaching American Indian and Alaska Native people who are seven times more likely to experience homelessness in King County. As of the [2020 Point in Time Count](#), we

know that American Indians and Alaska Natives make up less than 1% of the King County population and roughly 15% of the population experiencing homelessness.

We also know that American Indian and Alaska Native people are disproportionately affected by higher rates of COVID-19 [infection](#), [hospitalization](#), and [mortality](#). In a recently released report from the Urban Indian Health Institute, entitled [COVID-19 Impact on Urban Indians in Washington State](#), researchers found significantly higher demand for health and human services and continued need for flexible resources to address emergent community needs including homelessness response, eviction prevention, food security, childcare, and health care. Our organizations have been instrumental in addressing the devastating impacts of COVID-19 and have continued to provide critical services throughout the pandemic. Changes to our City of Seattle Outreach and Engagement contracts stymie our ability to respond to emergent community needs and reduce our ability to address increased demand for services among our relatives experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Since January 2021, we have provided outreach and engagement services with the understanding that no significant changes would be made to our contracts. Proposed changes, released without consultation in April 2021, abuse our good faith relationship to provide unreplicated culturally attuned outreach and engagement services and are misaligned with the legislative intent for the HOPE Team as outlined in [CBA-HOM-005-E-01](#). Specifically, we are concerned with the following:

Lack of Cultural Attunement

- The City of Seattle is taking advantage of community-based outreach providers by adding new requirements to facilitate encampment removals that were previously conducted by the Navigation Team. Program regulations requiring participation in City prioritized encampment removals is misaligned with our organizational missions, values, and service delivery models. We know encampment removals deepen health and housing disparities, deteriorate trust among our community and providers, and fail to address the systemic causes of homelessness. We will not engage in outreach directed by the HOPE Team, including participation in day-of encampment removals.
- Program regulations requiring HOPE Team geographic prioritization and coordination of outreach providers limits our ability to meet our relatives where they are at and deprioritizes our work as culturally specific providers. Our relationships with our relatives and community allow us to better serve Native people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. We need the flexibility to collaborate with each other and other service providers without the interference or redirection of the HOPE Team.
- HSD has confirmed high priority encampment sites will be determined by property-holding City departments including Parks & Recreation, Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle City Light, and Seattle Public Utilities in consultation with the Mayor's office. The dichotomy in values these property-holding City departments have do not prioritize the needs of our clients. The current model prioritizes city property over the well-being of people living outside. Outreach providers have long advocated for a trauma-informed and client-centered approach in outreach and engagement services. As

experts in our community, we expect to be the decision-making table when outreach strategies are developed in collaboration with other service providers and we strive to create a system that prioritizes people over property.

Resource Gatekeeping

- At the Select Committee on Homelessness Strategies and Investment Special Meeting held May 6, 2021, HSD stated the HOPE Team is the central access point for City set aside shelter referrals that will be prioritized for high-priority encampment removals. This practice is the same as the Navigation Team. For too long the City has held the bulk of set asides of shelter beds and resources that are now contingent upon provider participation in priority encampment removals. We are concerned this strategy continues to drive further inequities experienced among our Native community who are geographically dispersed and often reside in smaller groups that may not be deemed a priority by the City. As service providers, we need equitable access to our City's woefully limited shelter resources when that meets the needs of our relatives.

Burdensome Reporting Requirements

- Adding a *Supplemental Daily Outreach Report* places undue burden on service providers. These contracts already include quarterly and monthly reporting. The additional reporting requirement comes with no additional resources and five months into the award period. For most of our organizations, these contracts provide minimal resources, supporting less than 2.0 FTE. Additional reporting infringes on our already limited capacity to provide direct outreach and engagement services to our relatives.
- The addition of new daily reporting requirements and HOPE Team directed outreach raises concerns about the privacy of client data. Under the proposed strategy, our first interaction with relatives could be during an encampment removal that is destabilizing, traumatizing, and is not a time to gather sensitive information including mental health, substance abuse history, sexual orientation, immigration status, and any other information the City deems necessary in data reporting. At the Select Committee on Homelessness Strategies and Investment Special Meeting held on May 6, 2021, HSD shared they have no intention of analyzing the data collected from the *Supplemental Daily Outreach Report*. However, we fear the intentions for additional data reporting requirements will inform prioritization of encampment removals. We do not intend to share personal data that will inform any City strategies on encampment removal prioritization.

Recommendations

- **Remove all provisions on provider participation in encampment removals** to maintain trust and allow service providers to build relationships needed to address the underlying causes of unsheltered homelessness.
- **Remove geographic restrictions to ensure flexibility and autonomy of service providers**, including preserving our ability to prioritize culturally attuned services to our urban Natives relatives, regardless of where they reside.
- **Remove supplemental daily reporting requirements.**

- **Allow service providers to co-develop a shelter referral process and manage set aside shelter resources** through care coordination meetings that center the needs of relatives and increases cross-coordination and capacity among service providers.
- **Create a service provider feedback process** to ensure that HSD decisions are community-guided by service providers that are directly impacted by contract and program changes. In accordance with CBA-HOM-005-E-01, we intend to collaborate on an outreach strategy that is transparent and accountable.

As our community continues to disproportionately experience homelessness and the on-going impacts of COVID-19, we know our culturally attuned outreach and engagement services are needed more than ever. These proposed contract changes will result in harm to our unsheltered relatives and further drive racial inequities in homelessness across our region. We request that HSD immediately remove these concerning new contract provisions to remedy these concerns and maintain the continuity of care for our unsheltered relatives.

Sincerely,

Derrick Belgarde
Interim Executive Director
Chief Seattle Club
Derrick@chiefseattleclub.org

Norine Hill
Executive Director
Mother Nation
Nhill@mothernation.org

Esther Lucero
President & CEO
Seattle Indian Health Board
EstherL@sihb.org