



Statement of Colleen Echohawk on Compassion Seattle Initiative

April 3, 2021

I'm very hopeful that this initiative represents a turning point in homeless policy in Seattle after years of inaction and failure. This initiative represents a fundamental shift from where we've been. It actually treats the homeless crisis like the emergency it is. It dedicates significant resources to emergency rehousing. And prohibits sweeps unless there is a place for people to go.

The fundamental policy in the initiative mirrors the homeless plan I have been advocating in my campaign for mayor.

[Echohawk Talk 1: Chronic Homelessness](#) (3/9)

[Echohawk Talk 2: Emergency Rehousing Plan](#) (3/24)

[Mayoral Candidate Colleen Echohawk Envisions an "All-of-the-Above Approach" to Ending Homelessness](#)

I'm especially proud of the key role Chief Seattle Club has played in helping co-lead negotiations around the development of this initiative and forming it into an effective and coherent strategy. In particular, the initiative includes language that highlights the disproportionate rates of homelessness of Black, Indigenous and people of color communities and offers culturally appropriate and effective responses.

As a Native woman who has led a human service agency that has provided homeless services, I have the lens to lead with equity and justice in our homelessness response. I would ensure that Black, Indigenous and people of color led organizations are funded to serve their communities.

I'm mindful that we are currently in a place where it's been almost six years after a Seattle mayor signed a "Proclamation of Civil Emergency" to address homelessness, and 16 years after the "Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness" was announced. If people are skeptical, they have good reason to be.

While having a good plan is important, success comes down to having the experience and expertise to execute the plan combined with the political will to see it through. The work I have done building housing for our city's most vulnerable people over the last seven years shows I know how to get this job done.

Further, while this initiative is a good strategy, we can't use it as an excuse for another year of inaction in this crisis. We need to begin executing on the elements of this plan – rehousing people in our parks and on our sidewalks into emergency rehousing now. And with the city's moratorium on the 72 hour parking rule ending, we need to immediately increase Safe Lots to help people living in their cars transition to safe places to park with bathrooms and showers.

[Mayoral candidate Echohawk calls for 'emergency action' to stave off sweep in 'growing crisis around the homeless tent encampment at Miller Playfield'](#)

Of course, funding is a critical issue and will need to be addressed if this plan is to move forward. Additionally, while the initiative calls for 2,000 emergency rehousing units in the first twelve months, the reality is that the scope of our homeless crisis is significantly larger and we must be prepared to scale up.

This initiative is a positive step forward. It has the potential to break the gridlock of political inaction that has plagued Seattle. But to realize this potential, it will take leadership that has political will and experience in building housing and implementing programs that effectively meet the needs of our community experiencing homelessness. I'm running for mayor to bring this new generation of leadership to our city.

About Colleen Echohawk

Over the past two decades, Echohawk has served the most marginalized people living in the Greater Seattle community. As the head of Chief Seattle Club, a non-profit dedicated to the rapid re-housing of urban Natives, Colleen led the effort to create \$186 million in new affordable housing in Seattle. Under Colleen's leadership, Chief Seattle Club has received recognition from the Puget Sound Sage Visionary for Justice Award (2018), the Neighborhood Builder Award (2017), and the Municipal League of King County's Organization of the Year (2016). Colleen is the founder of the National Coalition to End Urban Indigenous Homelessness and a board member at the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

Echohawk is an enrolled member of the Kitkehahki Band of the Pawnee Nation and a member of the Upper Athabascan people of Mentasta Lake. Colleen and her family have been proud to call Seattle home for over two decades. In her spare time, she loves to read, sing karaoke, take

her dog Rizzo for a walk, listen to National Public Radio, and cook delicious food for her friends and family.

Website: www.echohawkforseattle.com

Email: info@echohawkforseattle.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/echohawkforseattle

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ccechohawk>

Instagram: www.instagram.com/echohawkforseattle

FOR MEDIA INQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

info@echohawkforseattle.com

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