

Testimony of David Preston to the King County Council
Re: Proposed 10-year Extension of Homeless Encampment Ordinance
(Proposed Ordinance No. 2014-0424)

Monday, October 13, 2014

Dear Councilmembers:

Many of the people in King County's homeless camps are permanently homeless. Has the County done any studies on whether people in these camps are making it into housing? No, they haven't. Why not? Because the outfit that runs the camps won't tell anyone who's in them. Not even the police. On July 2nd of this year, Bellevue cops responded to a drug-related death at Tent City 4. In their report, they noted that the man in charge . . . a guy named "Marvin" . . . refused to help them investigate what happened.

King County has waived thousands of dollars in permitting fees for this outfit, yet they can't even make them keep their camps clean and safe. The camp operators won't let the County check to verify that they're screening out criminals. As a result, criminals are getting in and crimes *are* being committed, both inside and outside the camp. Some of these crimes are serious. Here's a police report detailing 104 9-1-1 incidents that occurred at a camp in my South Seattle neighborhood. The list includes beatings, theft, and another drug overdose.

Recently the County Health Department wasted tens of thousands of dollars trying to get rid of rats at one of the camps. They spent thousands more cleaning up a mountain of trash the camp left behind when it was evicted. Come on! Picking up trash is basic stuff. It's stuff camp operators should be doing, not the taxpayers. I've written Mr. Dembowski with details on this . . . sent him photos of the trash and records on clean-up costs . . . but he doesn't answer my e-mails. And now he's sponsoring a bill that will give these camps our formal blessing?

Mr. Dembowski, members of the council . . . please don't roll out the welcome mat for people who abuse our generosity! Don't perpetuate a system whereby people are made to live in permanent squalor and filth. Until you show us that you can make the operators of these camps pick up their trash and keep drugs and criminals out, you should NOT move forward with any new legislation.