



The Coalition for the Homeless and undersigned organizations call on Louisville Metro Government to promptly adopt a new approach regarding unsheltered homelessness by immediately funding new, indoor, non-congregate shelter and changing camp clearing policies. The current approach—clearing homeless camps from public spaces without a place for people to go—does not solve the problem of homelessness. **If our city does not fund new, indoor shelter, we will be stuck in a never-ending cycle of camp clearings.**

Here are the facts.

The level of need far exceeds the capacity of the emergency shelter system here in Louisville. Over 1,600 Louisvillians experience homelessness on any given night. Together, Louisville organizations offer 750 emergency overnight shelter beds each evening (with more non-shelter options during extreme weather), and there are about 250 transitional shelter spots available. These beds are regularly full, leaving at least 500-600 people—including families—with nowhere to go each night.

Yes, like many cities, Louisville has a homelessness problem. Nationwide statistical analysis has proven that this is caused by a lack of affordable housing. (Have you checked rents in your neighborhood recently?) The solution to homelessness is housing. However, it takes a long time to create tens of thousands of housing units. As the city continues to invest boldly in the slow process of creating affordable housing, **we need a more robust emergency shelter system to meet the immediate need**, ideally by funding new indoor, non-congregate, 24/7 spaces, with a clear path to housing.

People often ask us whether homelessness is increasing in Louisville, or if it's just more visible. The answer is both. Over the past decade, development has pushed people out of long-standing hidden camps. As a result, the visibility of the homelessness crisis has increased (both downtown and beyond the downtown core). But it's also true that there are more people sleeping outdoors: 5,000% more unsheltered people received services last year than in 2018. And data shows that, year after year, a steady 88-90% of unhoused people here are from Kentucky or southern Indiana. There is no data to support the rumors that huge numbers of people are coming here from out of state to seek help.

The unfortunate reality is that—without a significant, immediate investment in indoor shelter—unhoused Louisvillians will continue to camp in public spaces for the foreseeable future.

No one should have to live on the streets or in camps. However, until we fund an adequate supply of safe shelter and housing options, clearing camps only forces people to find another place to camp. In this case, camp clearings only intensify and prolong the problem of homelessness. Displacing people from an established space disconnects them from their critical support network—including case workers and housing navigators—which can lead to the destruction of essential property: family photos, medicine, and documentation like birth certificates and social security cards. What's more is that the city spends thousands



of dollars to clear an encampment and displace people, only to spend thousands of dollars months later to clear some of those same people from a new camp. This is a misallocation of our city's resources.

In 2018, Metro Council unanimously passed a 21 day notice ordinance to provide consistency and clarity around camp clearings on city property. However, the vast majority of recent clearings conducted by the city are from state properties within Louisville, such as Interstate underpasses. In these cases, the city is instead providing anywhere between 24 hours and 10 days' notice. These inconsistencies create confusion, distrust, and unpredictability for people who are already in crisis.

Moving forward, we call on the city to implement these solutions:

- Immediately fund new shelter spaces (indoor, non-congregate, 24/7, and well-staffed) so every Louisvillian has a safe place they can sleep indoors.
- Adopt a comprehensive extreme weather plan so people who are unsheltered can stay safe, including not clearing any camps during extreme weather.
- When camps must be cleared, provide resources and consistent notice to people in encampments by closing existing loopholes, specifically by modifying the Memo of Understanding between the city and the Kentucky Department of Transportation that allows for fewer than 21 days notice to people in encampments.

Camp clearings don't end homelessness. If anything, they prolong it. Housing ends homelessness, and shelter saves lives. Louisville needs to immediately invest new dollars in providing indoor shelter, in addition to continuing to increase our investment in housing for our poorest neighbors.

To see the Coalition for the Homeless's New Path Home—a series of recommendations to end homelessness—see www.louhomeless.org/newpath.

Sincerely,

The Coalition for the Homeless
[and other undersigned organizations]