

April 3, 2019

To the All Home Coordinating Board:

Ensuring that the overall governance of our homelessness response system is aligned and anchored in racial justice is vital. Compelling evidence emerged in 2017 implicating the VI-SPDAT in the production of significant racial disparities when used to prioritize access to housing resources. A 2018 study of the VI-SPDAT further concluded that the tool is unreliable, insufficient, and does not measure vulnerability in a meaningful way (study enclosed). Reliance on this tool has increased the barriers that historically disenfranchised populations in King County – in particular, our Black, Latinx, and Native populations - face in accessing vital services. Continued employment of the VI-SPDAT is unacceptable.

Each provider below can attest to the fact that the VI-SPDAT is not in alignment with All Home's Strategic Plan to Lead with Race nor does it accurately assess vulnerability. We call on all of you to prioritize the necessary steps to phase this tool out of the assessment process for single adults currently experiencing homelessness. As we wait to address this urgent matter, we are complicit in perpetuating an unjust and inadequate system.

In October 2018, providers were informed that a new mechanism for prioritization would be developed in our community to ensure two things: racial equity and meaningful assessment of vulnerability. We were told this undertaking would take nine to twelve months.

Though this critical endeavor was a priority just a few months ago, momentum has effectively been usurped by the pursuit of redesigning the governance of our homeless response system. Currently there is no clearly identified timeline for the development of a new assessment process – this work can no longer wait.

While an interim prioritization process for single adults has taken a small step in the right direction to increasing racial equity, it still fails to meaningfully capture those who are truly the most vulnerable in our community – those with an increased likelihood to be harmed, victimized, or die while homeless and with an increased likelihood to not be able to secure and/or maintain housing without additional support. Furthermore, a process to improve racial equity that remains reliant upon an inherently racist tool does not address the root of the problem and continues to perpetuate an oppressive system. We owe it to those in our community who are experiencing homelessness to put in the hard work to provide a reliable system for facilitating access to housing, which was the original purpose of developing a Coordinated Entry System.

The immediate impact of the governance structure for people currently experiencing homelessness is minimal compared to the impact of the broken assessment tool that we continue to rely on. The lives of our severely disabled neighbors sleeping outside should not be cast aside while you spend months discussing how to govern this system. Development and implementation of a new assessment must take precedent over other work. We are failing the community we are privileged to serve if we do not move faster on this, and while we wait highly vulnerable adults will continue to be victimized and potentially die on the streets for no reason other than our inaction.

Our community's service providers and individuals with lived experience are unequivocally equipped with the expertise necessary to determine how to best assess vulnerability in a way that leads with race and social justice in mind. We have the knowledge, authority, and energy to make this happen - with or

without consultants to guide the way. We implore you to agree to allow us to leverage our expertise, existing tools, and other beneficial avenues so we can quickly act to improve this process and the outcomes for those currently experiencing homelessness in King County. Work completed last year can be leveraged as an alternate interim process to prioritize individuals without continuing to solely rely on the VI-SPDAT. Failing to seize this opportunity is a disservice to the entire community, but more importantly, it sends the message to our most vulnerable populations that their lives are not worth prioritizing.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Beckmeyer
DESC

Whitney Walker
REACH

Sam Oppenheimer
DESC

Lindsey Schoeneman
Lifelong

Eddy Matlock-Mahon
Lifelong

Genre Parker
Salvation Army

Thomas Regan
DESC

Larka Angell
DESC

Lauren Bolger
DESC

Alyssa Adwell
Neighborhood House

Lourdes Sanchez-
Neighborhood House

Leah Post
Neighborhood House

Plymouth Housing Group