



*Working for Justice Since 1967*

Columbia Legal Services advocates for people who face injustice and poverty. We seek to achieve social and economic justice for all, using policy reform, litigation, and innovative partnerships to reveal and end actions that harm the communities we serve.

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*Via mail and email*

January 15, 2016

Patricia Lally  
Director, Seattle Office of Civil Rights  
810 Third Avenue, Suite 750  
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Request for Race Equity Analysis of Homeless Sweeps

Dear Ms. Lally:

On December 14, 2015, the Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness (“Coalition”), Columbia Legal Services (“CLS”), and the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington (“ACLU”) sent Mayor Murray a letter requesting that the City of Seattle (“City”) suspend its sweeps of homeless encampments until certain practical and legal concerns were addressed. The City did not accede, stating instead that it would continue with the sweeps as planned. In addition to the concerns we already expressed, we write to your office to specifically request that the City’s policies regarding the recent sweeps be assessed through a race equity lens, especially in light of the Mayor’s own acknowledgment of the systemic racism that results in homelessness, which he stated is his Proclamation of Civil Emergency.

The ongoing sweeps should not be pursued for a variety of reasons. One concern relevant to the work of the Seattle Office for Civil Rights is that existing procedures have not been analyzed for their impact on minority populations. This goes against Mayor Murray’s April 3, 2014 executive order directing that all citywide initiatives shall incorporate a racial equity analysis prior to implementation. Given that the homeless population is disproportionately people of color, it is imperative that the City considers the effects of its ongoing actions through this lens.

Also, based on what we know of the sweeps and the population they affect, current procedures have a disproportionate negative impact on other protected groups, such as people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, and veterans. This too should raise serious concerns with your office.

Basic Human Needs Project • Children and Youth Project • Institutions Project • Working Families Project



**THE ALLIANCE**  
*for Equal Justice*

Kennewick  
418-F N Kellogg Street  
Kennewick, WA 99336  
(888) 201-9735

Olympia  
711 Capitol Way S, Suite 304  
Olympia, WA 98501  
(800) 260-6260

**Seattle**  
**101 Yesler Way, Suite 300**  
**Seattle, WA 98104**  
**(800) 542-0794**

Wenatchee  
300 Okanogan Ave, Suite 2A  
Wenatchee, WA 98801  
(800) 572-9615

Yakima  
600 Larson Building  
6 South Second Street  
Yakima, WA 98901  
(800) 631-1323

The City should suspend sweeps immediately for these and other reasons. At the least, it is necessary for the City to review the MDAR and other guidance, which were drafted prior to the expansion of the Race and Social Justice Initiative, to ensure the City's compliance with civil rights law and its own stated justice and equity goals. To reiterate, the Coalition and CLS hopes to collaborate with the City on these issues. But the rights and wellbeing of individuals affected by sweeps are of paramount concern.

We request that your office evaluate the City's procedures and practices of sweeping homeless individuals from their places of shelter to ensure the City makes good on its commitments to race equity and social justice, and to ensure compliance with all applicable civil rights laws.

We look forward to an opportunity to discuss this further, and to work with you on these issues.

Sincerely,



Ann M. LoGerfo, Directing Attorney  
[ann.logerfo@columbialegal.org](mailto:ann.logerfo@columbialegal.org)  
(206) 287-8615

Yurij Rudensky, Attorney  
[Yurij.rudensky@columbialegal.org](mailto:Yurij.rudensky@columbialegal.org)  
(206) 287-9659  
Columbia Legal Service  
101 Yesler Way, Suite 300  
Seattle, WA 98104