

December 12th 2022

Dear Denver City Council,

We the undersigned are writing to ask for the City Council to take action to solidify policy for Denver to protect the lives of houseless people by preventing sweeps of houseless people and their property when it is under freezing. Denver must activate emergency cold weather response by opening warming centers and halting sweeps any time it is under 32 degrees. The current standard of 10 degrees or 6 inches of snow is unconscionable!! No one should have their property taken and be left with nothing or be forced to move all their belongings when it is under freezing.

Medical professionals state that the risk of hypothermia is present anywhere under 32 degrees. If it is wet that risk goes up even more. Frostbite leads to lost limbs. People who are elderly, sick, disabled, or otherwise not in full health are even more affected by cold temperatures. Losing property to stay warm in a sweep and then being on the streets with nothing can be deadly.

Houseless people are being prevented from going inside in the freezing cold to get warm because they have to stay out to keep the City from taking all their property in a sweep. When people do go inside, they lose all their property when they get out. This does not help people get inside to be warm and it leaves people out in the streets in the cold with nothing.

When sweeps are conducted in freezing weather, this process itself is dangerous and traumatizing. Houseless people are forced to pack all their belongings in the cold and snow, often getting themselves and their property wet, dragging property long distances in the cold. When someone is sick or disabled this process is even worse. People are already often dehydrated, malnourished, sleep deprived dealing with stress, trauma, anxiety, mental health and physical health challenges. The stress of moving is bad enough without facing freezing temperatures and wet snow.

Warming Centers at Recreation Centers should be open in all freezing weather and sweeps should be canceled so that houseless people can safely access those warming centers without fear of losing all of their property.

After showing the current standard is not based on medical reasoning, DDPHE has said they will "revisit" this standard, However even if they do set a new standard this does not ensure that standard is followed. Last winter the City canceled some sweeps in cold weather, but conducted others in weather as cold as 4 degrees. We cannot count on verbal commitments from City departments to not conduct sweeps in extreme cold.

Policy needs to be set in place to ensure a safe standard is followed regarding cold weather response, including the policy for halting sweeps of houseless people's property in cold weather. City Council's job is to set policies for our City and this is a critical policy to set for the safety of our community.

Please take action to protect the lives of houseless people in our community.

Sincerely,

9to5 Colorado
American Civil Liberties Union, Colorado
American Friends Service Committee
Atlantis Community
Bayaud Enterprises

Be-Konnected: The Housing Connection
Clergy for Freedom and Justice and Family Advocacy and Crisis Education Intervention Team
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition
Colorado Poverty Law Project
Denver-Aurora Community Action Committee
Denver Catholic Worker
Denver Democratic Socialists of America
Denver Task Force to Reimagine Policing and Public Safety
Dry Bones Denver
Elevated Denver
Empowerment Program
Friends of SODen
Growing Home
Harm Reduction Action Center
Housekeys Action Network Denver
Janet's Kitchen
Mutual Aid Monday
National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
New Covenant Alpha And Omega Church
Occupy Denver
Reciprocity Collective
Redress Movement
Romero Theater Troupe
Seasoned with Grace Unboxed
Spring Institute
Together Colorado
Warm Cookies of the Revolution