

RESOLUTION NO. H-2-2018

A RESOLUTION declaring homelessness a public health crisis in Thurston County, directing the Director of the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services to lead the response, committing support for community wide efforts to reduce homelessness, and resolving to convene the Hazardous Weather Task Force and implement the hazardous weather plan.

WHEREAS, homelessness is a national, state, regional, and local issue affecting all of Thurston County, in both urban and rural areas, with the majority of those experiencing homelessness originating from Thurston County; and

WHEREAS, homelessness has devastating effects on human lives and severe health, safety, social, economic, and environmental impacts on cities, towns, neighborhoods, families, schools, businesses, healthcare facilities, and social service agencies; and

WHEREAS, the Thurston County Board of Health recognizes that many people seeking shelter, social services, transportation, and housing do so in urban areas where services and transportation are most accessible; and supports and joins the City of Olympia, which has the largest concentration of unsheltered residents, in working together and collaborating with all partners to find solutions; and

WHEREAS, Thurston County, through the Public Health and Social Services Department, provides approximately 5.8 million dollars each year to 35 nonprofit agencies that provide emergency shelter, coordinated entry, rental assistance, affordable housing, and other supportive services, and yet funding is inadequate to meet the growing population and demand; and

WHEREAS, the Thurston County Board of Health recognizes the vital contributions of nonprofits, faith-based organizations, community groups, advocates, and private citizens who provide temporary, permanent, and supportive housing, and other social and health services to those in need utilizing best practice approaches; and

WHEREAS, in a recent Thurston County survey conducted by Berk Consulting, homelessness was identified as the top concern and priority for citizens; and

WHEREAS, the cost of housing is rising, the vacancy rate for rental housing is nearing record lows, and there is not sufficient affordable housing in Thurston County all of which contribute to growing homelessness along with economic and family instability factors; and

WHEREAS, the number of people known to be experiencing homelessness in Thurston County on a given day has significantly risen in the past year with 835 persons counted in the Annual Point in Time Census; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, there were 1,670 children who experienced homelessness in Thurston County public schools, 38% of those experiencing homelessness are families with

children, and young adults, children and families make up the majority of those without stable housing in our community; and

WHEREAS, domestic violence is also a serious public health issue that is the fourth ranking cause of homelessness, with survivors fleeing domestic violence representing ¼ of those experiencing homelessness in Thurston County; and

WHEREAS, 38% of those identified were unsheltered, living in outdoor places not fit for human habitation, including streets, parks, wooded areas, and cars, putting people at risk of serious health conditions, communicable diseases, and even death; and

WHEREAS, there are record numbers of people living in encampments where lack of access to drinking water, handwashing, toilets, proper food and medicine storage, and waste disposal poses a serious risk to all people and the environment; and

WHEREAS, physical health was the most commonly reported disability among those in our community experiencing homelessness, and people without housing have high rates of chronic physical and mental health conditions and are three times more likely to die early. Physical health complications commonly experienced by those without stable housing and shelter include hypothermia, injuries, chronic pain, musculoskeletal disorders, hunger, malnutrition, skin diseases, foot disorders, infectious diseases such as hepatitis A, B, & C, shigella, tuberculosis, influenza, immune disorders, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, dental problems, respiratory illnesses such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, RSV, pneumonia, hypertension, diabetes, cancer, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other illnesses; and

WHEREAS, nearly 1/3 of people experiencing homelessness were people of color which is disproportionate to the Thurston County population indicating serious racial disparities that need to be addressed; and

WHEREAS, vulnerable populations such as those that are disabled, and those that suffer from substance use disorders and mental illnesses need supportive housing options that are currently not sufficient to meet the needs; and

WHEREAS, the Thurston County Board of Health seeks to address practices and conditions that cause a threat to the public's health and the safety and welfare of our community;

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Health of Thurston County, State of Washington, under the authority of RCW 70.05.060 resolves:

Section 1. Homelessness is declared a county wide public health crisis in Thurston County.

Section 2. The Board of Health declares support for and solidarity with the City of Olympia and other municipalities' efforts to address homelessness in Thurston County.

Section 3. The Administrator of the Board of Health, the Director of Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, is directed to prioritize this issue through the newly established Office of Housing and Homeless Prevention (OHHP) within the Thurston County

Public Health and Social Services Department, which will lead the county's role in response efforts and to designate available staff and available resources from OHHP along with Public Health Emergency Preparedness, Environmental Health, and Disease Control and Prevention to work with other County departments, municipalities, nonprofits, healthcare facilities, and other community members to pursue targeted solutions that will prevent and reduce public health hazards associated with this crisis such as improved hygiene, sanitation, vaccination, access to healthcare, and healthy shelter and housing.

Section 4. The Board of Health further resolves to provide support and leadership in effective community wide collaborative coordination, planning, and policy efforts to end this crisis and to implement actions that will reduce homelessness, increase affordable housing development opportunities, and address the health, safety, social, economic, and environmental impacts of homelessness through:

- A. The Board of County Commissioners
- B. The local Thurston County Continuum of Care (CoC)
- C. Thurston Thrives Coordinating Council
- D. Thurston Thrives Housing Action Team and Sub Groups

Section 5. The Board of Health will convene the Hazardous Weather Task Force and will coordinate with nonprofits and local municipalities to implement a county wide response of the hazardous weather "code blue" plan in an effort to prevent death and illness related to hazardous weather conditions for vulnerable unsheltered populations. The Director of Public Health and Social Services is authorized to activate the "code blue" plan, identify and allocate resources in partnership with nonprofits and local municipalities to increase shelter capacity, and identify funding to support the activation of code blue as needed.

Section 6. The period of November 1-April 30 is declared the "cold weather season" to ensure those without housing have continuous access to available emergency shelter resources regardless of temperature.

Section 7. The Director of Thurston County Public Health and Social Services is directed to prioritize this public health crisis by seeking approval from the Board of County Commissioners to hire a homeless response coordinator to serve the entire county and work in partnership with the City of Olympia homeless response coordinator and staff from other jurisdictions to implement actions recommended in the proposed Thurston County Homeless Housing Plan when adopted by the Board of County Commissioners.

Section 8: The Board of Health further resolves to prioritize, evaluate, and take proactive steps to address the underlying causes of homelessness, including housing affordability, domestic violence, behavioral and physical health, and health equity concerns and solutions to reduce racial, gender and ethnic disparities within the population of persons experiencing homelessness, and to explore implementation of the Regional Assessment of Fair Housing Plan, approved by Thurston County, the City of Olympia, and the Housing Authority of Thurston County.

Section 9. This Resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption.

ADOPTED: June 14, 2018

ATTEST:

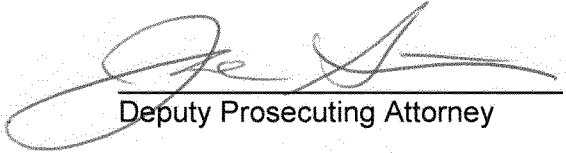
BOARD OF HEALTH
Thurston County, Washington

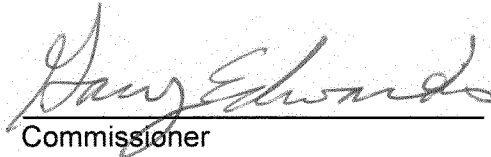

Clerk of the Board


Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:
JON TUNHEIM
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY


Vice-Chair


Deputy Prosecuting Attorney


Commissioner