



DOWNTOWN SPOKANE PARTNERSHIP

On behalf of the Downtown Spokane Partnership (DSP) representing employers, small businesses, nonprofits, and residents in Spokane's urban core, I'm writing to register our strong opposition for HB 1380.

While we appreciate the consideration for our unhoused neighbors, this bill misses a crucial opportunity to comprehensively address prioritizing getting people the help they need while ensuring the health, safety, and wellbeing of the entire community. The City of Spokane has become the de-facto social service provider for Eastern Washington, Northern Idaho, and Western Montana without adequate resources to address the overwhelming needs of unsheltered individuals living on our streets. Coupled with several state policies that prevent the city from intervening when these individuals do not have the capacity to care for themselves and/or pose a significant risk to themselves and others, Spokane is left to mitigate the impacts of homelessness versus proactively working toward solutions to end the cycle.

The *Martin v. City of Boise* decision that limited the ability to intervene without immediate access to shelter capacity no longer applies and should not affect Spokane's ability to regulate individuals obstructing businesses, sidewalks, and public rights-of-way. **This bill would undermine the ruling, lead to ongoing legal challenges, and hinder our ability to effectively address homelessness, public health, and safety.**

The state should focus efforts on prioritizing getting people the help they need. To do this we ask you:

- Expand behavioral health funding and services, including designated funds for additional treatment identified in SB ESSB 5536, opioid settlements, and behavioral health programs.
- Utilize involuntary withdrawal management and stabilization treatment for individuals in crisis suffering from mental illness and substance use disorders to protect them and the community.
- Require participation in treatment-focused jail diversion programs, including Community Court, Therapeutic Drug Court, and Mental Health Court, and remove convictions for successful completion of treatment-focused diversion programs. We know that a citation is not enough to incentivize treatment, there must be stronger consequences for failure to participate.

Prioritizing getting people the help they need also means addressing the needs of residents, employees, and visitors to feel safe. **We must re-establish order in our public spaces.** Sitting, lying, and camping on the sidewalks and underpasses of downtown creates conditions that prevent access, impede business, and render our sidewalks impassable. Growing encampments and personal belongings produces trash that is scattered throughout the area, creating not only an



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unsightly environment but also unsanitary and potentially hazardous conditions attracting pests to neighboring sidewalks and properties.

This is harmful not only to downtown residents and businesses but also those living on the streets of downtown who are too often left in the mire of addiction and mental illness and an almost certain early death.

Spokane has an interest in keeping its citizens safe and protecting limited public resources. Creating a special set of exemptions, privileges, and rights for some to occupy public and private property without complying with laws that apply to others undermines the ability of all citizens to access clean and non-threatening public spaces, while jeopardizing the economic viability of local businesses.

Our state cannot continue to be a place where people in crisis are ignored and allowed to sleep on the sidewalks, where our most vulnerable suffer and the basic needs of our residents, employees and visitors are forgotten.

Sincerely,

Emilie Cameron
President & CEO, Downtown Spokane Partnership

