



*City and County of Denver*  
CITY COUNCIL

March 3, 2016

Dear Mayor Hancock,

RAFAEL G.  
ESPINOZA  
DISTRICT 1

KEVIN FLYNN  
DISTRICT 2

PAUL D. LÓPEZ  
DISTRICT 3

KENDRA BLACK  
DISTRICT 4

MARY BETH  
SUSMAN  
DISTRICT 5

PAUL KASHMANN  
DISTRICT 6

JOLON CLARK  
DISTRICT 7

CHRISTOPHER J.  
HERNDON  
DISTRICT 8

ALBUS BROOKS  
DISTRICT 9

WAYNE NEW  
DISTRICT 10

STACIE GILMORE  
DISTRICT 11

ROBIN KNIECH  
AT-LARGE

DEBORAH "DEBBIE"  
ORTEGA  
AT-LARGE

Thank you for your leadership on homelessness in Denver since you took office in 2011. On December 11, 2015, City Council's Safety and Wellbeing committee convened an all-Council retreat to explore our existing City responses to homelessness and the potential for improvements and innovations. We thank your team and departments for their involvement in the planning and presentations, as well as for the valuable homeless services they perform every day.

The Safety and Wellbeing Committee held a follow-up meeting on January 27, 2016 to reflect on the retreat and to establish priorities for follow-up. As a product of that meeting, **City Council agreed that increasing the budget dedicated to addressing homelessness in Denver was an overarching priority that would make all other innovations possible.** While shelter was not selected as the most important priority for impacting homelessness, the Council understands the life-saving role shelter plays, and is concerned about the pending closure of the Peoria overflow shelter and the inefficiencies of utilizing new locations for each season. Therefore the Council requests the Administration to clarify its short-term and long-term intentions with regard to shelter, and to keep us closely informed.

Members of City Council requested an Ad Hoc Committee on homelessness that would allow us to work collaboratively with you and your staff to deliberate on homelessness priorities. Reflecting the majority opinion on City Council, the following specific priorities were identified.

**Increase the resources Denver commits to responding to homelessness, with a focus on the following priorities:**

**1) Increased permanent affordable housing, with support services.**

We acknowledge and commend the pending housing revenue proposal that the Administration is developing along with City Councilmembers, and see that as a critical centerpiece for achieving this goal. But it was clear from the retreat that Denver is not yet utilizing many of the features of the best practices for Housing First. Specifically, Denver needs clearer goals for homeless housing and more focused resources and coordination on achieving those goals.

**2) Addressing homeless families and youth.**

One of the most significant increases in the homeless population has been with families and youth. The DHS Adult and Family Assistance Program provides valuable support with

temporary housing and rental assistance, but the funding to assist Denver's low-income population with immediate housing needs before becoming homeless utilizes the vast majority of the Program's resources. Additional funding dedicated to assisting the homeless with housing support in a proactive basis should be considered.

**3) Mental health services.**

Since the incidence of mental health difficulties is present with a large percentage of our jail prisoners and homeless population, we are supportive of and looking forward to hearing the results of the upcoming mental health evaluation by a task force led by Don Mares and Regi Huerta. The evaluation of current services and potential recommendations on improvements will be essential to aid these citizens with critical mental health difficulties.

**4) Increased and more distributed homeless outreach throughout the city.**

Proactively triaging homeless individuals to assess substance abuse, mental health, and other issues that create homelessness is important to our system of providing care. Obviously, being able to provide housing and shelter so that services can be offered and delivered will be critical for a successful outreach program.

We look forward to partnering with your office to improve Denver's response to homelessness in these and other areas. It is also understood that improvements will require the requested funding to provide over future years in order to reach our goals on reducing our homeless population and breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Sincerely,

Councilwoman Robin Kniech

Councilman Wayne New