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April 4, 2020

The Honorable Jared Polis
State Capitol Building
200 East Colfax Avenue, Room 136
Denver, CO 80203
Governorpolis@state.co.us

Dear Governor Polis:

We are writing to request that you take immediate action to provide support for the homelessness support system and the people experiencing homelessness in the Denver metro area and across Colorado. Severely under-resourced, our homelessness service providers are on the frontlines of the crisis response to COVID-19 and are in dire need of support and resources from this Administration.

A recent report out of the University of Pennsylvania and Boston University showed that *people experiencing homelessness who are infected with Coronavirus would be twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die from the illness as the general population.*¹ Modeling by Colorado Coalition for the Homeless indicates that between 1,322-2,645 of CCH's more than 13,000 clients will need hospitalization, and thousands more will be infected. This startling figure does not include other people experiencing homeless who are not connected with CCH, those in shelter or living in encampments. Medical and non-medical professionals at CCH, shelters, and other direct homeless service provider locations have been working tirelessly for nearly a month to triage, test, and shelter individuals exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. However, to effectively prevent and respond to wide-spread infection among people living in these congregate settings, the state must prioritize and immediately provide resources to address the needs of this population.

While the rest of the state is subject to a "stay-at-home" order, people experiencing homelessness are sleeping shoulder-to-shoulder in overcrowded and understaffed shelters. The spaces intended for refuge have now become incredibly dangerous.

We urge you to take the following action:

1. **Support the request from Denver Office of Housing Stability (HOST) to establish an alternative shelter site and employ the support of National Guard staff.** This will allow for de-densification in current shelters and increased access to critical health care services and virus screening for a population of people who have likely been more continuously exposed to the virus than any other groups since the Stay at Home order was in effect. This approach could be used as a model across the state.

¹ https://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-paper_clean-636pm.pdf

2. **Make hotels and motels available to house people who have nowhere else to go to isolate/quarantine.** Denver has only been able to secure around 110 rooms and it has been even more difficult to secure space in other parts of Colorado. This is, in large part, due to reluctance from hotel and motel managers to engage in this critical emergency response strategy.
3. **Include homelessness service providers in the prioritization for delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE)** – masks, purifiers, disinfectant, Powered Air Purifying Respirator (PAPR) equipment, tents for triage, etc. – to homeless service providers, particularly those that deliver medical care. These frontline staff interact with hundreds of clients every day and need to be able to protect themselves and others.
4. **Provide additional testing capacity for expanded testing among people experiencing homelessness.** Currently, health professionals serving this population do not have adequate tests or supplies to contain the virus. If someone is symptomatic and has been sleeping in shelter, they should be tested for their own health and for public health purposes. It is against all best public health practices to allow someone with COVID-19 to remain in a large congregate setting.

We are grateful for your continued leadership and advocacy on behalf of Coloradans during this unprecedented time. We believe the bold actions this Administration has taken to contain the spread of the virus have been admirable, decisive, and smart. It is now time to take bold action to prioritize the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness and those who serve them.

Respectfully,

Senator Julie Gonzales, Senate District 34
Senator Chris Hansen, Senate District 31
Senator Dominick Moreno, Senate District 21
Senator Robert Rodriguez, Senate District 32
Senator Tammy Story, Senate District 16
Representative Adrienne Benavidez, House District 32
Representative Yadira Caraveo, House District 31
Representative James Coleman, House District 7
Representative Serena Gonzales-Gutierrez, House District 4
Representative Leslie Herod, House District 8
Representative Dominique Jackson, House District 42
Representative Susan Lontine, House District 1
Representative Jovan Melton, House District 41
Representative Dafna Michaelson-Jenet, House District 30
Representative Kyle Mullica, House District 34
Representative Emily Sirota, House District 9
Representative Mike Weissman, House District 36
Representative Steven Woodrow, House District 6
Councilmember Stacie Gilmore, Denver City Council, District 11
Councilmember Robin Kniech, Denver City Council At-Large
Councilmember Deborah “Debbie” Ortega, Denver City Council, District At-Large
Councilmember Jamie Torres, Denver City Council, District 3
Director Angie Rivera-Malpiede, RTD District C