

May 4, 2020

The Honorable Douglas Richardson, Chair
and Members, Pierce County Council
930 Tacoma Ave. S., Room 1046
Tacoma, WA 98402

Dear Councilmember Richardson:

This letter is submitted as public comment on the May 5, 2020 Council agenda item R2020-29, a Resolution of the Pierce County Council Adopting the Pierce County Five-Year Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness. In summary, the League of Women Voters of Tacoma-Pierce County encourages the Pierce County Council to reject this plan and ask for a new submittal within a short period of time.

There are many flaws with this document, and rather than enumerate all of them, the following is a partial list of categories of issues.

1. **Plan Structure and Overall Content.** Normally, a plan would contain these elements:
 - Existing conditions
 - Analysis of strengths of the existing system and challenges it faces
 - Goals (based on the analysis)
 - Strategies
 - Implementation Actions

None of these except goals appear in the plan that is before you.

The foundation of any plan is the discussion of existing conditions. Without that, there is no basis for goals. Not only does this plan not describe existing conditions, it doesn't even cite data that should be available and would be a significant part of analysis. There is a reference on page 3 to "more than 4,700 people have experienced homelessness" – but the Pierce County web site identifies "11,623 to date" in 2019. Given that the plan was dated December 2019, the complete mis-match of the number of people experiencing homelessness indicates that the strategies proposed in the plan have no basis in reality. Additionally, there are no breakdowns of other elements, such as race, gender, sheltered/unsheltered, length of time to rehousing, and more – all of which is currently shown on the County's own web site.

This same comment was offered to the CoC and county staff in October 2019 when public comments were solicited on the draft and the issue was not addressed in this plan. Without a starting point of existing data, the strategies have no basis.

Additionally, the lack of analysis means that the goals are meaningless. The basis of the percentages used in most of the goals, the outcomes in five years, and the methods to achieve the goals have no explanation.

2. **Details.** Beyond these overriding flaws, there are some details that make the crafting of this document sub-par for Council consideration, including the following:

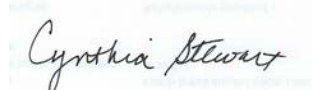
- Appendices not Available. The appendices were not provided by County staff and are not available on the Council web site, so there is no way to use that information in considering the plan's recommendations.
- Definition Incomplete. The definition of "homelessness" used on page 5 as the basis of this document is an incomplete sentence. Additionally, on that same page, the reference to being restricted by the varied definitions is not applicable. What may be restricted is the use of specific funds for certain strategies; what is not restricted is the opportunity to plan broadly and well and employ appropriate funding for relevant strategies.
- Continuum of Care. The plan confuses Continuum of Care with Continuum of Care Committee. Page 4 references Continuum of Care, which is a process, with the Committee, which is an entity.
- Racial Disparities described on page 25. Addressing racial disparities should be a very high priority for the County. We know that there is a massive disparity between the proportion of the population who are people of color and the ratio of people experiencing homelessness who are people of color. However, the description on that page is very confusing and does not lead to any conclusions about how to address this issue.

Knowing how much information is available from the dedicated and knowledgeable service providers who meet weekly as the Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness - which could have been well utilized in developing this plan - we are quite surprised by the vacuousness of this document.

The worst part of all is that this plan provides no foundation for the emergent need that will arise in the next few months as increasing numbers of people become homeless for the first time because of the economic catastrophe created by the COVID-19 pandemic. While this crisis could not have been anticipated as the plan was written, the plan does not provide any foundation for development of necessary and appropriate supplemental emergency response strategies. There is no way to tell what numbers the county might be experiencing, where they are, how much effect the projected new homeless population will have on the current system, etc.

Please do not pass this resolution. Please ask that the plan be redrafted in a way that addresses these issues.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Stewart, President