

Assembly Member  
Meg Zaletel  
Midtown, District 4

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July 9, 2021

Mayor David Bronson  
via email – [mayor@muni.org](mailto:mayor@muni.org)

Dear Mayor Bronson –

The new administration and Assembly have spent the last several weeks considering how to best move forward with a plan for sheltering as we look to transition from the Municipality's mass care operations. At this point with only 12 weeks before the proposed closing of the Sullivan Arena as a mass care facility, on or about October 1<sup>st</sup>, we urge you to consider a pause of plans for any new building or structure purchases and concentrate on a realistic and affordable plan for this winter.

The need for mass care remains elevated due to the lingering effects of COVID-19 pandemic and the economic recession, both of which reduced the supply of existing homeless and transient shelter capacity in addition to the lack of informal safety nets that existed prior to COVID, such as couch surfing or doubling up on housing, while increasing demand for these services.

However, these elevated numbers are not a realistic picture of the ongoing demand for services as established shelter operators resume more normalized and we begin to see the results of the recent \$4 million investments in high intensity case management. In addition, the mass care staff has been housing approximately 10 clients per week without the benefit of rental assistance.

To that end, we propose the following:

1. Continue the mass care operation eligible for FEMA reimbursement due to the elevated numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness needing shelter due to COVID-19.
2. If necessary for purposes of economic recovery to return the Sullivan Arena back to its original operations, identify either:
  - a. Other suitable Municipally owned buildings to continue the mass care operations, such as the Ben Boeke and/or Dempsey Anderson Ice Arenas, Fairview Recreation and/or Spenard Recreation Centers or a combination of locations; and/or
  - b. Lease a non-Municipal space for continuation of the mass care operations equivalent to the size of the Sullivan Arena. This should occur as a last resort, given the additional costs of leasing a space not owned by the Municipality.
3. Pilot the navigation center concept at the mass care facility, whether at the Sullivan Arena or another location.
  - a. By piloting the concept, the Municipality will have hard numbers on the cost of such operations and likely some valuable lessons learned for purposes of building a navigation center from the ground up; and
  - b. More importantly, this will help move people from homelessness into housing with the appropriate supports thus decreasing the overall need for shelter.
4. Work with the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services to expedite Medicaid waiver applications for those individuals in shelter that may qualify for assisted living or nursing level facility of care so that they may be moved to more appropriate locations that meet their needs. The mass care transition plan identifies approximately 150 individuals who may be eligible.
5. Work with our established shelters, particularly Brother Francis Shelter and the Anchorage Gospel Rescue Mission, to increase their census so individuals can continue to benefit from their programs.

These recommendations do not preclude the exploration of a purpose-built navigation center, but provide time for careful evaluation, design, and a plan of finance to ensure that such a project is successful. We commend your urgency and commitment to working to ensure that all people in need have access to shelter, but we must proceed with the diligence required of public officials when spending public monies. We have great concerns that the operations of a facility of the size and scale currently proposed, approximately \$12 million annually, far outstrip monies budgeted for shelter operations with no

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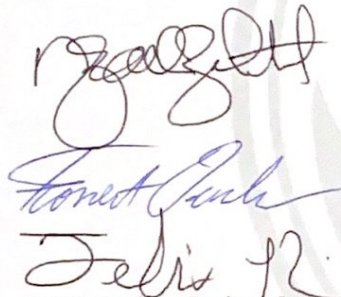
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clear indication of where to find nearly \$10 million more annually. Moreover, Dr. Morris has stated on multiple occasions he'd prefer the Municipality use ARPA funds to cover the cost of the type of facility the administration now proposes. Another tranche of ARPA funds is due next spring. Waiting until these funds are available, combined with the remaining Cares Act fund balance gives the administration time to pull together a comprehensive plan and budget and even start design on a new facility as part of a comprehensive strategy to address homelessness and service gaps within the Municipality. In short, there is the opportunity and possibility to create true systemic change with these funds if we work together.

Once again, because the greatest need is for this winter, continuing with mass care is a reasonable way forward while leveraging the Municipality's investments through the ARPA, ESG-CV and CDBG-CV funds in case management and housing programs to continue the decrease of the shelter population. Either continuing with the Sullivan or another facility or facilities provides the Municipality with the capacity to continue to implement those programs and move forward with camp abatement throughout the winter as well ensure everyone's safety.

In closing, we want to reiterate, this does not mean we <sup>are</sup> ~~are~~ in opposition to the goals or even necessarily the concept the administration proposes, but we believe that what we have is a concept, not a fiscally responsible plan of action that has been thoroughly vetted. More time, planning and collaboration are required before making a substantial investment like the one that is requested. We hope that a pause on any new plans will bring together the Administration, Assembly, Coalition Members, service recipients and philanthropy to collaboratively find a way forward that makes homelessness a rare, brief and one-time experience.

Sincerely,



Meg Zaletel  
Tomot Chuk  
Felix R.

Cc via email: Barbara Jones, Clerk for Distribution to Assembly Members  
Adam Crum, Director of Health and Social Services, State of Alaska  
Diane Kaplan, President and CEO, Rasmuson Foundation  
Jasmine Boyle, Executive Director, Anchorage Coalition to End Homelessness  
Anchorage Legislative Delegation