



November 7, 2022

The Honorable Cassie Franklin
City of Everett Mayor
2930 Wetmore Ave – Suite 10 A
Everett, WA 98201

The Honorable Dave Somers
Snohomish County Executive
300 Rockefeller Ave M/S 407
Everett, WA 98201

Dear Mayor Franklin and County Executive Somers:

This letter serves as an official response from the Washington State Departments of Transportation, Commerce and Washington State Patrol to a letter from the City of Everett and Snohomish County dated Nov. 3.

While the letter is addressed to WSDOT, all three of our agencies are compelled to respond as we partner closely with local jurisdictions and service providers in our work for the state Right of Way safety Initiative.

First, work is now underway on three sites in the City of Everett. To date, three people experiencing homelessness within the city on state right of way have received housing in Everett. It is important to note that the Everett Police and city homeless coordinator took part in those efforts and were wonderful to work with. We look forward to more of that good work and our intent is to continue it. These are the facts.

We are deeply frustrated that the city and county did not reach out to have a conversation with our departments prior to publishing and publicly sharing false secondhand information across social media platforms. You attempted to shame our agencies and accused us of transporting people experiencing homelessness across county lines, an accusation that is patently false and offensive. What is factual is that our contracts with Helping Hands and Volunteers of America Western Washington only allow funds to be used to house people living unsheltered in Snohomish County. We request a public retraction of those statements and an apology. Such accusations undermine our collective ability to do the work the public demands and unhoused individuals need.

As we have repeatedly shared with the public and media, there are four actions that allow encampments to be removed from state right of way:

1. The offering of shelter and services to people living there (local jurisdiction & service/outreach providers; funding offered by Commerce)
2. Secure storage of their belongings (local jurisdiction & service/outreach providers)

3. Safety and security for people on site and work crews (local law enforcement & WSP)
4. Restoration and cleanup of the property (WSDOT)

WSDOT's responsibility and expertise is limited to the last action, the cleanup of right of way. As such we must rely on our partnerships with local jurisdictions, law enforcement and social services when addressing any area with an encampment. And, as we've learned repeatedly, we need safe, secure housing options and services for the people in the encampments so they don't simply move to another outdoor space.

That is where the state right of way safety initiative comes into play. Had you contacted us earlier, we could have provided you the following information.

The initiative began earlier this year with a legislative proviso requiring WSDOT and Commerce to work with local governments and service providers as part of the work to "transition persons residing on state-owned rights-of-way to safer housing opportunities, with an emphasis on permanent housing solutions," and that the housing offered is a "meaningful improvement over the individual's current living situation" and "well-matched to an individual's assessed needs."

The state right of way initiative provides significant financial resources using grant opportunities funded and managed by the Department of Commerce. This capital infusion represents an unprecedented funding opportunity for local jurisdictions like the city and county to augment resources to provide shelter and housing options – and is part of the state's response to its role in this matter.

To say that the county or city are unaware of this initiative is false.

We offered both the city and the county an opportunity to avail themselves of these funding opportunities and both chose not to do so. (See attached letter of decline from the county.)

Commerce and WSDOT met with county and city representatives, including at one point the Everett Deputy Mayor, to discuss this effort with the goal of convincing the city and/or county to submit a proposal. We made clear it was the state's strong preference that the city and or county submit a proposal. City officials ultimately did not pursue funding opportunities.

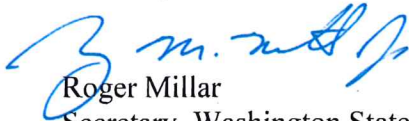
Because the city and county did not submit a proposal, Commerce released a request for proposals to find non-profit organizations that could work with us to move unsheltered people off of state right of way and into housing in Snohomish County. Helping Hands and Volunteers of America Western Washington submitted successful proposals and were awarded funds in August. The county supported the contract awarded to Volunteers of America Western Washington. (See attached letter of support.)

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WSDOT, Commerce and WSP sincerely want to partner with the city and county to work together to resolve the challenges associated with encampments on state right of way. We know from successful approaches elsewhere in the state that working together with responsible local jurisdictions is essential to provide safe, secure housing and service solutions for those living homeless. We – state, county and city - align in more ways than one on the topic of homelessness.

Our state agencies enjoy close working relationships with the city and county. We're puzzled by the approach taken in the letter and ultimately with media and constituents to rely on secondhand false information as opposed to relying on the trust and good relationships our agencies have historically enjoyed with each other. We will share this response publicly because your public statements have generated many constituent and media inquiries. We hope we can agree that constituents prefer to see government working together and not taking public shots at one another. We are glad to sit down with both the city and county to walk through the good work being done to move those living homeless on state right of way within the city and county to housing options.

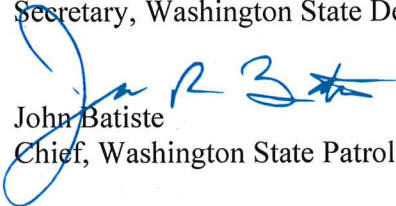
Sincerely,



Roger Millar
Secretary, Washington State Department of Transportation



Lisa Brown
Secretary, Washington State Department of Commerce



John Batiste
Chief, Washington State Patrol



Snohomish County

Human Services

3000 Rockefeller Ave., M/S 305
Everett, WA 98201-4046
(425) 388-7200
FAX (425) 259-1444
www.snoco.org

July 18, 2022

Dave Somers
County Executive

Tedd Kelleher, Senior Managing Director
Housing Assistance Unit
Community Services and Housing Division
Washington State Department of Commerce
1011 Plum St. SE, Olympia, WA 98504

RE: Rights of Way Initiative

Dear Mr. Kelleher:

Thank you so much for your communications regarding the Department's Rights of Way Initiative for priority counties.

We here in Snohomish County agree that the challenges the Initiative is intended to solve are considerable in the targeted counties including ours. After careful consideration and in consultation with key municipalities, however, we have determined that we are unable to meet the requirements outlined in the Rights of Way Initiative Process and Requirements document in the timeline indicated. We are, however, very interested in continuing conversation with the Department regarding ways in which Snohomish County might support this important effort.

Thank you for your understanding and we look forward to future conversations regarding addressing the needs of people who are unhoused in Rights of Way in our community.

Please feel free to reach out to me at maryjane.brell@snoco.org, (425) 388-7204, or (425) 249-6216 with any questions or concerns and I look forward to working with you in the future!

Sincerely,

Mary Jane Brell Vujovic, Director
Snohomish County Human Services

MJBV:mb

cc: Lacey Harper, Executive Director



Snohomish County

Human Services

August 15, 2022

3000 Rockefeller Ave., M/S 305
Everett, WA 98201-4046
(425) 388-7200
FAX (425) 259-1444
www.snoco.org

Mr. Brian Smith, Chief Operating Officer
Volunteers of America Western Washington
2802 Broadway
Everett, WA 98203

Dave Somers
County Executive

RE: Department of Commerce Application – Washington State Right-of-Way

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am writing in support of Volunteers of America Western Washington's (VOAWW) application to the Washington State Department of Commerce to provide encampment outreach and sheltering services to people encamped on rights-of-way in our state.

Snohomish County has a long-standing contractual relationship with VOAWW for a variety of human services. In the past two years, our contracted services have included the administration of nearly \$100 million in emergency rental assistance to households at-risk of eviction, operational support for three Community Resource Centers, sheltering and supportive services for homeless families, senior center programming, refugee resettlement support, and countywide leadership in hunger prevention and food distribution. In each of these service areas, VOAWW is meeting or exceeding performance standards.

VOAWW's willingness to continually evolve their program portfolio while maintaining quality service delivery has made them an invaluable partner in our county. For example, Snohomish County provide support for their resource center in Sultan to launch shower services for the growing number of individuals who have been experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. Last year, this new shower program served 174 individuals leveraged their existing co-located services to help unsheltered residents transition into shelter and access employment, health care, substance use treatment, and basic needs supports such as clothing and meals.

As VOAWW looks to expand the depth of services at the Arlington Resource Center to include a mobile outreach team, we are confident in their ability to expand upon their meaningful, impactful partnerships with both community partners and the vulnerable populations they serve in north Snohomish County. VOAWW's housing services have also proven to be successful at rapidly placing individuals experiencing chronic homelessness into privately held rentals and helping them retain housing.

I believe VOAWW will continue to be successful as they grow housing and outreach services to meet the complex needs of Snohomish County's unsheltered residents. In addition, I believe in their capacity to manage quality facilities in any new capital project they launch.

Sincerely,

Mary Jane Brell Vujovic, Director
Snohomish County Human Services