

Re: Hate Prevention, Mitigation and Community Initiatives Action Plan

Dear Council,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and discuss this matter.

I am writing regarding the violent arrests, eviction, and hate happening across the city as a response to our unhoused communities. As MPP Rima Bernsm said, homelessness is skyrocketing, and shelters are full. Violently evicting people does nothing to house them. Evictions serve only to traumatize residents, their supporters and they criminalize those who work to keep unhoused people warm, fed, and safe. These are the facts.

Volunteers, community workers, and front-line staff have been attempting to keep our unhoused community not only warm, fed and safe but loved. The city continues not to provide adequate support, so the community has been instead. The response to community support has been police brutality, racism, hate, and violence. Again, we know that evictions do not lead to individuals being housed, cared for or supported in any way; they are not a solution. Evictions are an act of violence and hate. Arresting community advocates and supporters is an act of violence and hate. If you continue to implement evictions in this way, providing no suitable, free housing or adequate supports, you will be continuing to commit violence against the community.

There are solutions. We need a city-wide Hate Prevention, Mitigation, and Community Initiatives Action Plan. We need to provide wraparound housing and community support. These initiatives need to be led by those with lived experiences, specifically by the BIPOC voices we know are disproportionately represented in shelters and encampments. Encampment evictions and the criminalization/arrest of Black youth and housing advocates in the community are due to a lack of awareness of hate mitigation, prevention, and proper city-wide initiatives.

From what I am observing and experiencing in the community, Council and the HPS do not seem to think that they are acting in any violent or hateful way whatsoever. It also seems as though Council and HPS do not believe you have the power to change anything. In multiple meetings, I've witnessed many questions about whether motions fall under Council's authority and whether you can do anything about specific issues. You hold more official power than I and you hold more power than the volunteers continuing to do this work, and yet we continue to do this work and use our voices to ask for change. If you are not urgently responding to the hate and violence happening to the community then you are not adequately connected to the entire community. Furthermore, you cannot claim to care if you do not act in every way you can. We cannot leave people out or behind in our community planning and care.

Please listen to what the BIPOC community is asking for instead of violently silencing them. I hope you decide to start sharing your power with the entire community you represent, specifically these Black youth and housing advocates who have been consistently harmed under your authority.

- Katie Sullivan