



Position Statement: Persons in Public Places

Draft Date: August 24, 2018

Date Approved by Membership: September 21, 2018

Date Amended by Membership:

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this statement is to outline the Homeless Coalition of Windsor Essex County's position on the activities of people experiencing homelessness in public places. We acknowledge that it is impossible to know at all times which individuals in public places are experiencing homelessness, but we believe starting with compassion in all interactions is a valuable position.

BACKGROUND: People experiencing homelessness often spend a significant amount of time in public places. Within these public places they may engage in activities more commonly conducted in private. This can include sitting/laying/sleeping, storing of personal effects, consumption of substances, intimate relationships, arguing with a friend/lover, or attending to one's personal needs. For those experiencing homelessness in particular, a contributing factor for engaging in these activities in public is the lack of personal, private space. We note that some of these activities are offences under municipal by-laws or the criminal code, particularly when conducted in public. We believe that preventing and ending homelessness would go a long way in alleviating these issues. However, until such time, the following are our positions:

POSITION 1: We believe that the following principles should guide any interactions with people experiencing homelessness who are engaging in private activities in public spaces:

1. **Compassion** – In considering how to respond, all persons should start from a position of compassion.

2. **Relationship** – If approaching individuals experiencing homelessness regarding behaviours in a public space, all persons should first seek to come to know and understand the individual and their circumstances.

3. **Least Punitive Response** – We acknowledge that a police or security response to individuals is at times appropriate, and our members will continue to utilize these responses as needed. However, for more individuals, ticketing and incarceration are pathways to homelessness or barriers to exiting homelessness, rather than pathways out. Therefore, we advocate for a social services response, focused on housing with appropriate supports, whenever possible.

4. **Advocacy** – Any person engaged in confronting public behaviours of people experiencing homelessness can be of assistance to systemic change. We invite anyone concerned with these issues to work collaboratively with the Homeless Coalition of Windsor Essex County to identify concerns and work for permanent change.



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Position 2: Major events can place a particular strain on these issues. Increased policing and security around such events can lead to increased interactions based on private activities conducted in public spaces. Therefore, in addition to the above principles, we would add the following positions regarding major events:

1. **Discretion** – All individuals have the equal right to accessing public spaces and should be generally left alone in these spaces unless they are at imminent risk of harm to themselves or others. Very specifically, threats of ticketing or arrest should not be used as a means to move people out of sight of those attending the major event.

2. **Collaboration** – Increased policing and security for major events may unintentionally lead to the observation of behaviours that are illegal under municipal by-laws or the criminal code. Persons addressing these behaviours are invited to work collaboratively with street outreach or mental health crisis services in considering their response to these behaviours.

Conclusion: The Homeless Coalition of Windsor Essex County acknowledges that individuals experiencing homelessness may engage in private behaviours within public spaces, often due to the lack of alternative spaces to live their lives. We invite our members and all other persons who may seek to address these behaviours to follow the principles listed above, which we believe will lead to best outcomes for those experiencing homelessness.