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# EDITORIAL: Issue 300 leaves our homeless in the cold

By: The Gazette editorial board 16 hrs ago



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Denver’s deceptive “Right to Survive” Issue 300 threatens to harm the homeless, the state’s economy and some of Colorado’s finest urban spaces.

We contacted Denver Mayor Michael Hancock about this disturbing proposal and found an ally with similar concerns. He wants Denver voters to defeat the measure, and tells us this:

“Every person has the right to survive, but this measure may ultimately prevent people in need of resources from receiving the help they need,” the mayor said in a written statement. “The city has devoted tens of millions of dollars to supporting our residents experiencing homelessness and (I) agree with our service providers that I-300 is not the solution to this complex issue.”

By “service providers,” Hancock refers to a variety of charities that help the homeless and comprise the Denver Homeless Leadership Council. They include: Catholic Charities; Colorado Coalition for the Homeless; The Delores Project; Denver Rescue Mission; The Gathering Place; St. Francis Center; The Salvation Army; Urban Peak; and Volunteers of America.

“Collectively our organizations have been serving families, individuals and youth experiencing homelessness for over 100 years,” states a letter by the Denver Homeless Leadership Council that explains the organization’s nuanced opposition to Issue 300.

That ballot measure would allow anyone to permanently squat on sidewalks, in parks, and on other public property in boxes, tents or mere sleeping bags. The new law would negate Denver’s camping ban and forbid law enforcement from disrupting the homeless, even to offer assistance of food, mental health or addictions treatment.

The law would allow people to live permanently in legally parked cars, preventing any disruption to their “privacy” in one’s “person and property.”

Documentaries and news reports show us how revisions of camping bans and curfews have led to tents, shanties and boxes clogging the streets, sidewalks and parks of Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. If Denver passes 300, expect the city to become a cautionary tale and a symbol of homelessness.

“Presently, no other city or county has passed a comparable broad sweeping initiative to allow unimpeded access to public properties for people to reside indefinitely,” states an assessment of Issue 300 by the Commonsense Policy Roundtable, Colorado Concern, the REMI Partnership, the Denver South Economic Development Partnership, The Colorado Banker’s Association, and the Colorado Association of Realtors. Those organizations are among a growing number of businesses and associations organizing in opposition to Issue 300.

The Denver Homeless Leadership Council asks Denver voters to consider its position on Issue 300 “in its entirety, not just in soundbites.” (Please read entire statement here)

The council believes passage of 300 could have “far reaching” unintended consequences.

“This minimal concept of ‘survival’ provided by the initiative offers little to improve the welfare or security of the unsheltered homeless community in Denver,” the letter states. “Individuals experiencing homelessness will remain susceptible to volatility of life on the streets — exposed to extreme climate, violence, injury, exploitation, and even death.”

Instead of passing 300, or stigmatizing the homeless to defeat it, the Homeless Leadership Council wants Denver to focus more on expanding a continuum of services that include: appropriate shelter; affordable housing; permanent supportive housing; and support services that focus on behavioral health, workforce development, increasing employment and income. We could not agree more. The homeless are not a public enemy. They are the public, just like anyone else.

A high-quality civilized society cares most about those with the least. It does not turn its back on homeless people, leaving them to weather the cold and die of illness and exposure on sidewalks and in parks. We can think of no more cruel and callous copout than a law that effectively prevents law enforcement from helping people with big problems and resources insufficient to buy basic shelter.

Denver should defeat Issue 300, and then take to heart the advice of the Homeless Leadership Council. Mayor Hancock is right. His city has devoted tens of millions of dollars to helping the homeless, but there is more we can all do in Denver and throughout Colorado.

Big hearts, open minds, generous wallets, innovation and helping hands can help those who suffer the brutality of life on the streets. We should not pass any law that gives license to ignore them. Defeat Issue 300, and then get busy doing more to help the least among us enjoy lives of health, warmth, shelter, safety, and prosperity.

the gazette editorial board