



SPOKANE COUNTY
SHERIFF
SHERIFF OZZIE D. KNEZOVICH

"In partnership with the community -
Dedicated to your safety"

September 22, 2022

Mr. Roger Millar
Secretary of Transportation
310 Maple Park
Olympia, WA 98504 - 7300

Dear Mr. Millar:

The lawlessness and public health implications caused by the current conditions of the camp at 3rd and Freya (whose more common name represents anything but hope) continues to impact one of Spokane's most marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Clearly, WSDOT, Commerce, nor our elected state officials are concerned with the plight of this extremely disadvantaged community. If this camp were located in your neighborhood, or the Secretary of Commerce's backyard, this issue would have been resolved long ago. I have spent countless hours speaking with residents who have been greatly impacted by the State's inaction and assure you these citizens have lost all hope for resolution.

You asked about my plans to ensure that "each" resident of the camp has access to safe and secure housing options. My plan is to provide bus tickets to the location of each residents' choice, allowing them to reunite with family and to assist them in recovery. I will also engage the faith community to help with drug, alcohol, and mental health treatment. In one such example, a local pastor provides a tested and proven program to address these issues. Additionally, in light of the current housing options offered by the City of Spokane and developed with the Commerce Department, there is presently 25 million dollars allocated to provide for "safe and secure housing options." Frankly, it would be far safer for Commerce to simply pay a year's worth of rent for the estimated 600 people at the camp than to allow the situation to continue. However, without implementing treatment for the drug, alcohol, and mental health needs, any investment would likely prove unsuccessful and fall far short of helping those at the camp out of poverty.

This tragic situation has continued for more than nine months without any action on your part. And to be clear, this is not a crisis of an economic nature; the residents of the camp did not lose their jobs due to the economy. There are plenty of jobs available to camp residents that continue to go unfilled. We have also created a building trade apprenticeship program in the last several years available to indigent individuals who find themselves in similar circumstances. This option is freely available to the residents of this camp. However, this has nothing to do with affordable housing, jobs or the economy, and has everything to do with the ongoing crisis fueled by drug and alcohol abuse, and the concurrent mental health issues associated with such abuse.

At this point I have to ask how WSDOT plans to prevent future injury with respect to those camp residents who have so far experienced rape, beatings, brandings, thefts, shootings, stabbings, and other similar crimes which are repeatedly being committed at the camp and in nearby neighborhoods, businesses, and communities. These neighborhoods, businesses, and communities continue to suffer the consequences arising from the actions of camp residents and the concurrent inaction of the WSDOT. WSDOT's inaction serves to condone these criminal acts. Lastly, the known hazards presented by the continuing dumping of raw sewage and human waste, both at the property and nearby, presents a significant health hazard to the Spokane community.

WSDOT's inaction has, and will continue to have, catastrophic consequence without immediate action. WSDOT's inaction demonstrates a complete lack of compassion for nearby residents by allowing these deplorable conditions to manifest in a substantially marginalized community. By allowing these conditions to continue, WSDOT is complicit in the wretched conditions at the camp.

Mr. Millar, I assure you it is my intent to restore safety and order, and to provide assistance to the residents of this marginalized community in a situation that is entirely of WSDOT's creation. If you disagree, please feel free to take action that will timely resolve this matter. However, my position is steadfast in that this community can no longer stand idly by and allow the residents of the camp and the surrounding neighborhood to experience these inhumane conditions created by WSDOT's inaction.

I will also seek an audit of the WSDOT, the State of Washington, and City of Spokane in their funding of Jewels Helping Hands and Ben Stuckart for the operations at this camp and other homeless camps within the greater Spokane County area. I intend to conduct a full investigation into potential fraud related to this funding. I will also be contacting the FBI with respect to possible public corruption, the misuse of public funds, and the circumstances surrounding the formation of this camp. It appears the formation of this camp was merely an effort to "pass the buck" to the citizens of our County and the City of Spokane.

In conclusion, Mr. Millar, I hope you note that I do not refer to this encampment as "Camp Hope". It represents anything but that. Consider this letter notice to WSDOT that I plan to clear this camp by mid-October, 2022. WSDOT's dereliction of their duties to address this matter must not continue. Moving forward, WSDOT must recognize their responsibilities and provide a plan to understand the grave nature of their responsibility and failure in "...ensuring that each and every resident of Camp Hope has access to safe and secure housing options...".

As my final suggestion, if WSDOT wishes to demonstrate their compassion, I suggest that those responsible consider sponsoring a member of this camp with a room in their own homes, consistent with WSDOT's suggestion to the East Side neighborhoods of the City of Spokane.

Respectfully,



OZZIE D. KNEZOVICH, Sheriff
SPOKANE COUNTY