Dear Mr. Johnson,

I’m writing to you about your 2019 film, *Seattle is Dying*, and how it misrepresents homelessness and people experiencing such. Instead of being an informative film that actually takes a look at the lives of the unhoused in Seattle, it comes off as a regurgitation of common and uninformed talking points that perpetuate the stigma surrounding homelessness, which is the last thing one wants to do if they want to educate people on the subject. It does a disservice to both people experiencing homelessness and their allies alike, and makes the whole situation more precarious than it should be. I am of the opinion that the film should be pulled from Komo News’ website and YouTube and a formal apology be written, since not only is it very inflammatory and upsetting to many, it’s very misinformed and akin to propaganda, and not only does it make people experiencing homelessness look bad, it makes Komo News look bad for having produced such.

The film uses extremely dehumanising language and rhetoric used to describe people experiencing homelessness, such as referring to them as “lost souls” and referring to the crisis as a “disease”. These terms become meaningless when one finds out that the visible homeless—those who sleep on the streets of major cities—make up only a fraction of the total number of people experiencing homelessness. Most people who are without a home are only temporarily so, and would not meet the level of decompensation shared amongst the visible homeless population. So to completely ignore this fact and instead focus on the visible minority that make up those on the streets is extremely misleading and not representative of homelessness as a whole.

Something else that was glaringly obvious when I watched *Seattle is Dying* is the sheer bias in those you interviewed and derived opinions from. Many of those whom you interviewed are either a business owner, a local right-wing politician, a police officer, or what have you; the one thing they have in common is that they’re always white. This isn’t to say that white people are untrustworthy, but that you either didn’t think to interview a broad spectrum of people and see what their opinions are, or specifically handpicked the interviews they wanted to show in their documentary, neither of which do you or the film any good. It paints an extremely one-sided view of the issue. You also only ever interview one person that’s actually homeless, whilst showing what said person has done whilst under the influence, essentially cancelling out everything they had to say and marking it as invalid. If one is going to do a documentary about homelessness, it would be essential to actually interview people experiencing homelessness and get their input on the situation, letting viewers derive their own opinions instead of trying to force an agenda.

Something I’ve noticed is that the main argument that *Seattle is Dying* constantly hints at is the notion that law enforcement officers are not doing enough to keep Seattle’s homeless population “under control” (a phrase I use very loosely), and that rampant drug usage is a main cause of homelessness. It proposes the idea that Seattle’s homeless population should be swept up off the streets and sent to correctional facilities where they either do time for their crimes or enroll in some kind of program where they become stabilised and are able to find a job, a home, or some other way of getting up on their feet. This might sound good on paper, but really, there are a lot of flaws with this argument. Homelessness isn’t solely caused by lack of law enforcement or drug usage; rather, those are merely side effects of the problem. The real cause for the increase of the homeless population would be the cost of living skyrocketing in recent years coupled with a lack of affordable housing in Seattle. And not only that, but drug addiction isn’t something that one can really treat with force or punishment, it’s an illness that requires a great amount of care, treatment, and support to overcome. Locking people up won’t solve anything, and frankly, now more than ever, it shouldn’t be police officers that deal with at-risk populations, because they’re not properly trained to deal with it. One solution would be to reduce the funding that police and authorities receive and offset it to a dedicated force of people and resources that are specifically designed to deal with homelessness and the accompanying drug usage, and not only that but fund a program for affordable housing that people can work their way into. None of these should be the responsibilities of a police force, as their main goal is law and order, not helping a vulnerable population, and to argue that using an iron fist to accomplish such is extremely misinformed, especially when police officers frequently abdicate the responsibilities they are given if it’s not someone they like.

The film perpetuates the harmful myth that homelessness means being an unkempt person sitting on the sidewalk outside of a Nordstrom as they deal with drug addiction, but in reality, that’s only a small subset of the population, but a very visible one at that. So to make a full-length documentary about this subset, and use it to represent homelessness as a whole, only paints a very bleak picture of homelessness, one that is full of misunderstanding, misinformation, and misinterpretation, and is dangerous in that it spreads a hostile and demeaning view of the situation, which we need less of if we want to solve the issue at hand.

Should you ever consider remaking the film, I would recommend taking pointers from *Nomadland*. While admittedly it is a fictional tale, it’s realistic fiction, and much more realistic than *Seattle is Dying* could ever hope to be, since it actually portrays what life is like for many of those who are considered to be “homeless”; They’re only houseless, and for many, only temporarily so. Their problems aren’t caused by drug abuse or addiction; they’re caused by major events they have no control over. And yet they stay hidden because they’re not sleeping on the streets; they’re living in their cars or some kind of temporary shelter. So again, to only focus on the visible population in Seattle and attribute it to something that would be considered a side effect rather than a cause is extremely misleading. Volatility in the stock or housing markets where they may have 401k portfolios or mortgage plans can either lose 90% of their value overnight or become completely unmanageable the next morning, which can drive people to homelessness. So should you ever decide to do a remake of *Seattle is Dying*, I recommend starting there.

I know it’s very hard to understand all the ins and outs of homelessness when one hasn’t experienced it firsthand, and how that can lead to many misconceptions. But it’s important to do as much research as you can when wanting to document something not very well understood, and it’s important to get input from people who are actually involved in such. Unfortunately that doesn’t seem to be the case for *Seattle is Dying*, and its one-sided view of homelessness doesn’t do anyone good, regardless where they may stand on the issue. I hope you take into consideration what I have to say, because at the end of the day, we all want to see Seattle be the best it can be, and it’s important to properly educate ourselves if we want things to get better.

Sincerely,

Andrew