Dear Ms. Gonzalez,

I am writing to you in regards to the current crisis of homelessness in Seattle, especially after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The events of the last 12 months have been absolutely precarious, to say the least, and both those who are unhoused and at risk of being unhoused have bore a large brunt of it all, with many falling into homelessness as a result. The situation now is more dire than ever, and an intervention is urgently needed. These people had no control over the events that played out, so it’s up to us to help them back up after their devastating blow.

As I write this letter, dozens of tents and hundreds of people experiencing homelessness dot the streets of Seattle whilst billionaires like Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates revel in their wealth and get the opportunity to go to space, something most of us never will. It honestly is quite saddening to know that people have to live like this every day, and frankly it’s also quite upsetting that not very much is being done to help them. Seattle is experiencing tremendous growth due to the number of people flocking here for jobs in the booming tech industry, but at the same time many are turned away due to the lack of a coordinated response towards the growing number of people experiencing homelessness as housing prices climb ever higher. If the city wishes to keep thriving for years to come, it’s extremely important that it is the most presentable it can be.

If we wish to solve homelessness, we first need to cast aside some common misconceptions about it. First, while those on the streets make up a majority of the visible homelessness that people see, they only make up a fraction of the total number of people experiencing homelessness. The rest are those who are only temporarily unhoused, but they still do need intervention. Second, drug abuse and mental illness are less of a direct cause of homelessness and more of a catalyst or side effect, so to attribute those as direct causes is quite misleading. Either way, both should be treated as issues that require time, care, counselling, and comfort, and not be dealt with by law enforcement. And that would be misconception number three, the myth that police force is necessitated to deal with those experiencing homelessness. Instead there should be a dedicated task force composed of social workers and psychiatrists that take the time and care to actually address the problems at hand, as police officers are not trained to deal with such. The more we actually get to know homelessness, the easier it will be to solve.

One of the first and most effective things to do would be to levy a graduated income tax; those who fall into lower income brackets pay nothing whilst individuals who rake in lots of money will be taxed based on how much they earn. Without this vital step, there won’t be nearly as much money to help those experiencing homelessness, and the already vast gap between the rich and poor will only widen and get worse. Another thing to do is to redirect this tax money towards programs to help those experiencing homelessness get back up on their feet. Organisations such as the Compass Housing Alliance have done wonders in this endeavour, but they can only help so many people at one given time with the limited money and resources they do have. The city should be funding housing alliances like these and extending grants to any new organisations that come up, if they’re not by the city themselves. Along with housing programs should come more affordable housing. This is something that Seattle is very lacking in as of late, if more of it is not available should there be an expansion of housing programs, it’ll be hard to get everyone looking for affordable housing into such, which will become a huge bottleneck. And while this is all happening, the police should be barred from clearing out homeless encampments, as it will take time to help everyone involved, and some may not even want such help at all. Plus, doing such never solves anything, it just upsets those it affects and in the end they simply settle down elsewhere, perpetuating a fruitless game of cat-and-mouse. It would be best if they were left where they were until help comes their way, as they don’t need anymore run-ins with the police whilst being as vulnerable as they are.

Seattle is a prosperous and thriving city with limitless potential and room for growth, but at the same time is experiencing a painful side effect of such unprecedented opportunity. And unfortunately, the current approach to try to alleviate it is only doing more harm than good, and has shown almost zero net benefit. So it’s time to take a different approach, and actually address the issues at hand. As someone who’s gotten to know Seattle for the majority of my life, I want to see it be the best it can be, and I’m sure you and many others would agree. Accomplishing such a task will not be easy, but if you play your cards right, the result will be glorious, and every Seattleite will benefit from it. I hope you will take my words into consideration, because the issue at hand is very important and critical and as such needs as much input and suggestion as it can get, not only for those it affects, but everyone else involved as well.

Sincerely,

Andrew Garzon