



## NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION

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Mindy Woods  
Seattle, WA

Founded in 1974 by  
Cushing N. Dolbear

December 6, 2021

Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Esteemed Councilmembers,

On behalf of the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), I write to express our support for [The Way Home campaign](#) and their partners working to end encampment evictions in the District of Columbia (DC). Homelessness is a racial and social justice issue that is further exacerbated when we criminalize our unhoused neighbors and forceably evict them with no alternatives in place. DC must stop evicting people in encampments and instead make robust investments in housing resources for the lowest-income residents.

The structural causes of homelessness in DC and in other communities throughout the country are a lack of homes affordable to extremely low-income people, and the severe cost burdens that low-income renters confront. For every 100 extremely low-income households in DC, only [50 rental homes](#) are affordable and available. [Sixty-two percent](#) of the city's lowest-income renter households pay more than half their incomes on rent, leaving them one unexpected expense away from eviction and homelessness. The creation of no-tent zones criminalizes our unhoused neighbors without taking the necessary steps to address homelessness and housing poverty.

We stand united with The Way Home campaign in urging you to pass [Councilmember Nadeau's emergency legislation](#) to stop the creation of "no tent zones." Outlined below are the concerns that this emergency legislation aims to address.

*Current CDC guidance recommends against encampment evictions:* During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDC [provided guidance and best practices](#) against evicting encampments. Mayor Bowser followed that guidance for a year before engaging in harmful encampment evictions. These forced encampment evictions occurred under the guise of improving public health. Complaints about public health are usually coded in racism and stereotypes about homelessness. The emergency legislation will provide a clear path forward to both protecting the safety of encampment residents and addressing public health concerns.



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*Not everyone at the closed encampments has been housed:* The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services (DM HHS) provided housing to approximately [70% of residents](#) at the closed encampments, leaving 30% without any alternative living place. As DC enters the winter months, those individuals pushed out of encampment and who remain unhoused must relocate elsewhere on the streets or navigate the city's shelter system. The District should allocate resources to ensure that all unhoused people have quality, accessible and affordable homes in communities of their choice.

*Encampment evictions hinder DC's ability to end homelessness:* Forced encampment evictions are traumatic to encampment residents, decreasing their trust in the government and housing programs aimed at assisting them. Additionally, it costs more to enforce encampment evictions than to allocate resources towards proven housing solutions such as rental assistance.

*Encampment evictions criminalize homelessness:* The criminalization of homelessness is harmful to unhoused people, who may experience harassment, property loss, incarceration and criminal penalties. Criminalization creates a vicious cycle between incarceration and homelessness, which magnifies existing racial inequities in the criminal legal system.

NLIHC encourages the Council of the District of Columbia to vote yes on Councilmember Nadeau's emergency legislation to stop the creation of no tent zones.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Diane Yentel  
President & CEO