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## Public Policy Memo

The number of unhoused individuals in Pierce County has continued to trend upward. Public spaces are becoming increasingly affected and homelessness is becoming a public health crisis. While the main reasons for long-term homelessness are economic and housing-related, untreated mental health and substance use disorders can create additional barriers to becoming housed. Connecting a person with wrap-around services in transitional or permanent supportive housing is more cost-effective and has improved outcomes when compared to becoming housed without needed services nearby.

The City of Tacoma enacted an ordinance prohibiting camping and storing personal belongings on public property within 10 blocks of a temporary shelter in November 2022. Violation of the ordinance is punishable by up to a \$250 fine or 30 days in jail. With the ever-increasing number of people living unsheltered, the demand for temporary shelters, supportive services, and affordable housing has increased. Criminalizing homelessness and economic hardship increases stigma but does nothing to increase access to help.

Low-barrier rapid rehousing options that do not require transitional steps or demonstrated sobriety can be the most helpful for chronically unhoused individuals. Programs that provide individualized services have been shown to be effective. The City of Tacoma implemented a behavioral health sales tax of .01% that could be used in part to support The Community First model. It provides housing in micro shelters and all the supportive services to provide whole-person care. Residents gain a sense of community and are less likely to return to homelessness. With appropriate funding, multi-agency, and government collaboration, individuals experiencing chronic homelessness can be empowered to become a part of the community in which they live.

