

June 16, 2016

City Council Testimony - Monday, June 20<sup>th</sup>

RE: Testimony of Eric McNair Scott

Dear Council Members:

My name is Eric McNair Scott, and I'm a Care Manager for Sea Mar Community Health Centers. First, I'd like to thank Council for genuinely wanting to find a solution to our growing homeless problem. As evidenced by the many community leaders and supporters gathered this evening to give testimony, it is clear this issue is very important to a lot of us in Vancouver.

There are many stories from my work that illustrate the connection between homelessness, chronic illness, and increased health care costs, so let me share just one. We started working with a woman, who we call Mercy, who was very ill, with many complex health issues, and who was also homeless. She lived out of her truck with her partner and two teenage children. She visited the emergency room 61 times in the year before we enrolled her in our Care Management Program. Many of her visits were preventable re-hospitalizations that could have been avoided if she had secure housing to recuperate in. As you can imagine, the cost burden to healthcare providers who continuously help indigent patients like Mercy is staggering.

Sea Mar's team worked closely with her to connect her to every housing resource available in the area. Through a program with the Vancouver Housing Authority, she received a Section 8 housing voucher. This was a real victory for her and her family! Unfortunately, Mercy ran into another brick wall: public housing waiting lists that stretched on for years and a very limited supply of private housing accepting Section 8 vouchers.

Every day for the past three months, Mercy has diligently followed up on housing leads and submitted applications with no success. However, despite her best efforts, she has only a few weeks left before her housing voucher expires. There simply is no housing stock for the very low income, and landlords have their pick of applicants. Her applications are not being considered and her health conditions are not improving. Even with all the support she is getting from Sea Mar and VHA, a person simply cannot manage complex chronic health conditions very well when living in the back of a truck.

We're all frustrated by these circumstances, but there is hope when communities can come together to resolve these issues for themselves and their neighbors. The Vancouver Housing Authority, and non-profits like Sea Mar, would benefit immensely from another tool in the box that helps build more affordable housing. Right now, Sea Mar is planning to build 60 units of affordable housing in Clark

County, with a significant portion being set aside for families like Mercy's. It is increasingly difficult to rely on hyper competitive state and federal subsidies to fund large affordable housing projects. If passed, the Affordable Housing Fund would undoubtedly bring a much-needed funding source to the Vancouver community that will make the difference in many of these future projects.

With that, I'd like to encourage City Council to vote yes on placing the Affordable Housing Fund on November's ballot. Letting the voters decide this issue is the best way for our community to feel invested in solving our toughest social issues. Thank you.