



Guam Homeless Coalition
Letter to the Editor
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The Guam Homeless Coalition has several overriding concerns with Attorney General Doug Moylan's recent eviction effort at the homeless encampment across from the Micronesia Mall.

The first of these is communication. As with any large undertaking, communication, coordination and cooperation are imperative. The Guam Homeless Coalition was unfortunately not consulted for any of these aspects. We believe our subject matter expertise is necessary for the dignity and safety of these people. The Guam Homeless Coalition members perform weekly outreaches to our island's homeless and have built a trust with these individuals in understanding their plight in life. A simple briefing with the AG's office could have significantly decreased the amount of taxpayer money and law enforcement resources spent on this event, and virtually eliminated the stress this operation so obviously caused these individuals.

The strain on the island's shelters is also well known by the Coalition and the low probability of placement for these individuals would have been helpful for the AG to comprehend prior to disbanding the encampment. Reviewing the past 10 years of PIT count data, one can see that there has never been enough shelter to solve homelessness on our island. Oversimplifying the condition does not address the problem. This is because the factors of homelessness are complex. A person does not just simply decide to stay in a derelict building or makeshift shelter. Many life factors bring them to such a situation.

This leads to the second concern: safety. Evicting a homeless person or family from their encampment may make headlines, but if no shelter is available, this action puts them in further danger and pushes them into further despair. It also pushes these human beings deeper into the jungle or margins of our community, where they are more vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual assault or other traumatic situations. Thus homeless persons become invisible and hidden, which was, we hope, not the intent of this initiative.

Our third concern was the complete lack of compassion demonstrated by the AG throughout this effort. Homeless people are still people - with feelings, issues, and fears just like the rest of us. To be divisive and judgmental or "tai mamalao" as the AG put it in his press conference, is what pulls us further from each other and our compassion.

Disbanding encampments and vilifying panhandling under the guise of public safety stokes a dangerous sentiment of intolerance and shame when current census numbers show that 29,408 of our people have incomes below the poverty level, and 13,403 families make less than \$50,000 per year. Many of us are just one single unfortunate life event from a downward spiral that could cause us to become homeless.

Homelessness exists because people don't feel at home where they are - for one or many reasons. The Guam Homeless Coalition's goal is to empower homeless individuals, families, and those at risk of homelessness to achieve self-sufficiency by providing support through awareness, education, and advocacy. We encourage Attorney General Moylan to open a line of communication with the coalition and we stand ready to offer support and discuss solutions, just as we have for decades.

Samantha Taitano
Chairperson, on behalf of the entire Board of Directors
Guam Homeless Coalition