



SPOKANE CITY COUNCIL

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VIA EMAIL

January 30, 2026

The Honorable Strom Peterson, Chair
House Housing Committee
Washington State Legislature

The Honorable Natasha Hill, Vice Chair
House Housing Committee on Housing
Washington State Legislature

The Honorable Adison Richards, Vice Chair
House Housing Committee on Housing
Washington State Legislature

The Honorable Sam Low, Ranking Minority Member
House Housing Committee on Housing
Washington State Legislature

The Honorable Cyndy Jacobsen, Asst. Ranking Minority Member
House Housing Committee on Housing
Washington State Legislature

The Honorable Deb Manjarrez, Asst. Ranking Minority Member
House Housing Committee on Housing
Washington State Legislature

Dear Honorable Members of the Washington State Legislature:

We write today as two of Spokane City Council's most senior members to establish our opposition to House Bill 2489. We must preserve local government authority and the ability for communities across our state to establish and enforce laws that balance the needs of their respective communities and constituents.

This proposed language effectively prevents Washington cities and towns from regulating encampments in public spaces, which can have a serious impact on public safety unless extraordinarily narrow standards are met, including availability of "adequate alternative shelter space." It further will prevent cities' ability to effectively connect many individuals to life sustaining services.

The passage of a 2023 ballot initiative to regulate the use of public spaces was approved by 74.66% of Spokane voters and was subsequently struck down by the courts. The Spokane City Council voted unanimously to adopt the "Safe and Accessible Public Spaces" ordinance (C36785) and all Councilmembers agreed to co-sponsor the legislation.

A key piece of this legislation is to incentivize referrals to services. This is a crucial tool for individuals experiencing homelessness and battling addiction that can facilitate immediate access to substance abuse treatment programs. Without enforcement these tools cannot be successful.

Police Chief Kevin Hall, hired by Mayor Lisa Brown in 2024, has worked closely with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. He has expressed optimism with respect to the Safe and Accessible Public Spaces ordinance and believes the outcomes and data are beginning to show positive trends. This further amplifies the need for City Council to be nimble while establishing policies and processes based on data.

The adoption of ordinance C36785 was necessary to ensure preservation of the public peace, health, and safety in the wake of a nationwide fentanyl crisis for the residents and visitors of Spokane. The ordinance provides more direct instructions and discretion for Spokane Police officers in reference to enforcement of camping and obstruction laws. Furthermore, the Spokane Police Department's strategic priorities include deploying holistic all-city strategies to address quality of life issues and expanding community-centered policing strategies to build public trust. The residents of Spokane have spoken loudly on this issue and empower a police department focused on community policing.

It was the intent of the City Council through the passage of the Safe and Accessible Public Spaces ordinance to further to allow alternatives to enforcement of obstruction and camping prohibitions to individuals who demonstrate their willingness to constructively address their circumstances – again leading to better outcomes. Spokane has an incredible safety net of social services available to our community members and we stand ready to offer those individuals a hand up. The inability to effectively implement changes to City's camping, obstruction and other laws relating to public property and rights-of-way in response to an ever-evolving addiction and homelessness landscape poses a significant threat to public peace, health, and safety of the residents and visitors in our community.

Simply, HB 2489 hinders the ability of locally elected officials to effectively govern. We have demonstrated our ability to meet the challenges of our city through different tools, needs and approaches. We deem it essential to adopt a position of opposition with respect to HB 2489 before the Washington State Legislature considers the information. We urge you to consider this position as you debate the merits of this proposed legislation.

Sincerely,



Betsy Wilkerson, City Council President



Michael Cathcart, City Council Member, Dist. 1

Cc:

Rep. Andrew Barkis
Rep. April Connors
Rep. Jeremie Dufault
Rep. Andrew Engell
Rep. Debra Entenman
Rep. Mia Gregerson,
Rep. Debra Lekanoff

Rep. Julia Reed
Rep. Brianna Thomas
Rep. Joe Timmons
Rep. Janice Zahn
Senator Marcus Riccelli
Rep. Timm Ormsby
Senator Jeff Holy

Rep. Mike Volz
Rep. Jenny Graham
Senator Mark Schoesler
Rep. Mary Dye
Rep. Joe Schmick