



NATIONAL COALITION **FOR** HOUSING JUSTICE

NCHJ Calls on the Biden-Harris Administration and Bowser Administration to Immediately Halt Plans to Forcibly Remove Unhoused People in McPherson Square

Washington, D.C. – National members of the [National Coalition for Housing Justice \(NCHJ\)](#) call on the Biden-Harris administration and Bowser administration to immediately halt plans to forcibly remove unhoused people in McPherson Square on Wednesday, February 15, two months ahead of schedule before all unhoused individuals in the encampment have been housed or moved to bridge housing while they await permanent options. The plan to forcibly remove unhoused individuals violates the best practices and proven solutions called for in the Biden-Harris administration's [federal strategic plan](#) on homelessness, and it undermines the administration's commitment to using a people-centered Housing First strategy, the success of its [House America](#) initiative, and its focus on [advancing racial equity](#). Forced removal from encampments is cruel, not a real solution to homelessness, and further dehumanizes those experiencing homelessness. We cannot end homelessness until we see all people as deserving of safe, stable homes.

At the request of the local D.C. government, the National Park Service agreed to forcibly remove unhoused individuals from the encampment in McPherson Square, two months sooner than expected, making it more difficult for unhoused individuals in the encampment to be connected to permanent housing. Only a handful of the individuals who live in the park have been approved to receive housing assistance, and many of these individuals will not be able to move into homes prior to the forced removal, putting their ability to be rehoused at risk. Because forced removals tend to disconnect individuals from service providers and frequently leads to lost documentation and possessions, this action will ultimately make it more difficult for individuals to exit homelessness.

The plan to forcibly remove unhoused individuals is in direct conflict with the recently released Biden-Harris U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness [federal strategic plan](#), which states:

"Unless encampment closures are conducted in a coordinated, humane, and solutions-oriented way that makes housing and supports adequately available, these 'out of sight, out of mind' policies can lead to lost belongings and identification which can set people back in their pathway to housing; breakdowns in connection with outreach teams, health care facilities, and housing providers; increased interactions with the criminal justice system; and significant traumatization—all of which can set people back in their pathway to housing and disrupt the work of ending homelessness."

The plan also goes against the administration's own value of [advancing racial equity](#); Black people represent [45 percent](#) of the general population of the District of Columbia, but they account for [93 percent](#) of people experiencing homelessness meaning this forced removal will disproportionately impact Black residents in McPherson Square.

NCHJ engaged with and urged the [Biden-Harris administration](#) and [Bowser administration](#) to work with stakeholders to rehouse unsheltered individuals as quickly as possible using best practices and proven solutions. We offered to convene all stakeholders, including the residents of McPherson Square, to develop a plan to address the systemic issues at play that create and perpetuate homelessness. To date, neither the Biden-Harris administration nor the Bowser administration accepted NCHJ's offer to convene stakeholders before the forced closure of McPherson Square.

Instead of forcibly removing unhoused individuals, the Biden-Harris administration should instead prioritize long-term solutions to homelessness by immediately connecting individuals to housing, paired with the supportive services individuals may need and want, such as mental health and substance use counseling and employment services, among others. To end homelessness, we must ensure rental assistance is universally available to all eligible households, expand the supply of rental homes affordable and available to people with the lowest incomes, and ensure critically needed services are widely available.

National and local advocates will be on sight and available for further comment at McPherson Square on Wednesday, starting at 7am.

"Kicking people off the streets – let's sit with that. A wealthy global superpower kicking human beings off streets that they shouldn't have been forced to in the first place. This is really inhumane when we know of compassionate and dignifying alternatives. I'm calling for all of us to be accountable in recognizing how systems are failing and how we can actively transform failed systems. This COVID era is showing us that we are more alike than different when it comes to our vulnerability to unstable housing. We must act in solidarity and call our local and federal governments to account for these violations to human rights," said **Marcella Middleton, Executive Director of A Way Home America.**

"Properly helping our unhoused neighbors requires compassion and leading with the values that we profess to hold. People are in these circumstances because our systems have failed and trust has been critically broken between government structures and the people they are meant to serve. It is imperative that we do better for our communities. Actions that forcibly remove our unhoused neighbors in this way only set us back," said **Peggy Bailey, Vice President for Housing and Income Security at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.**

"Forcibly removing unhoused people from public spaces without a safe and sustainable housing plan is bad for public health, criminalizes poverty, and most importantly, traumatizes and harms people with nowhere to live. Continuing to displace people does nothing to address the national crisis around the lack of affordable housing and mental health services. We have the evidence and tools to manage situations like this more effectively and humanely-we can all do better," said **Deborah De Santis, President and CEO of Corporation for Supportive Housing.**

"Evicting residents of McPherson Square, or any public space, without immediate access to a safe and dignified place to call home, is ineffective, unjust, and perpetuates harm to our unhoused neighbors. We urge our federal and city partners to stop the raid and commit to taking an approach grounded in the guidance of the Federal Strategic Plan by fully utilizing available resources, including the offer of support from local philanthropy, to end homelessness for its citizens at McPherson Square and other areas across the district," said **Amanda Andere, CEO of Funders Together to End Homelessness.**

“Forced encampment evictions are not a solution to homelessness, and our leaders know this. By accelerating the clearing of the McPherson Square encampment during hypothermia season, our federal and city leaders are retreating from their commitments to the McPherson residents, contradicting the newly-released Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, breaking their alignment to Housing First principles, and tarnishing each administration’s achievements on homelessness to date. We call on the Biden-Harris and the Bowser Administrations to immediately halt the proposed forced eviction so that a comprehensive approach can be put in place,” said **Ann Oliva, CEO of the National Alliance to End Homelessness.**

“The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans implores the DC government to halt the early and unjust closure of the McPherson Square Encampment. Experiencing homelessness is one of the most challenging things a person can face and forcible removal of your belongings and shelter is exceptionally cruel and can make it harder to access housing in the long run. We know that these actions are not a solution to homelessness and flies in the face of the Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness. We call on the Bowser and Biden/Harris Administrations to follow the guidelines of the strategic plan and focus on housing as a solution rather than forced eviction,” said **Kathryn Monet, CEO of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.**

“Destroying the temporary homes of unhoused people is inhumane and traumatic to the most vulnerable residents of our communities. It is also bad policy, particularly when the D.C. government has permanent housing for every encampment resident at McPherson Square, but through inefficiency and bureaucratic errors, failed to deliver that housing to the persons most in need. The federal government should stand by the federal strategic plan to end homelessness and urge D.C. to honor its housing commitments instead of further traumatizing its citizens,” said **Antonia Fasanelli, Executive Director of National Homelessness Law Center.**

“The Biden-Harris administration has an immediate opportunity to practice what it preaches and to be a model for the country and communities working to address homelessness. The administration must immediately halt National Park Service’s involvement in forcibly removing unhoused people from national parks in the absence of adequate housing. Instead, it must follow its own guidance to communities and work towards a humane solution that makes housing and supports adequately available to all encampment residents,” said **Diane Yentel, President and CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition.**

“Youth Collaboratory urges the D.C. government and the National Park Service to halt the destruction of the McPherson Square encampment and take advocates up on their offer of resources to find housing solutions for all of our unhoused neighbors living in the square. Forcibly evicting residents from the encampment ahead of schedule and without long-term housing options does nothing to resolve the issues of homelessness in the city and will cause harm. There are solutions to homelessness that do not involve destroying encampments without having housing solutions for all residents,” said **Megan Blondin, Executive Director of Youth Collaboratory.**

NCHJ has worked closely with The Way Home Campaign, a coalition of nearly 7,000 people and 110 organizations committed to ending chronic homelessness in Washington, D.C., to coordinate a response to the forced removal at McPherson Square.

“As an organization providing homeless street outreach to over 33 square miles of D.C., we see firsthand that clearing encampments harms our unhoused neighbors, forces them to move from one area to another, and erodes trust. We are deeply concerned about the Bowser Administration’s decision to evict 70 of our neighbors from the McPherson Square encampment during hypothermia season – a move that is cruel and counterproductive to both D.C. and the Biden administration’s goals of ending homelessness. We are calling on Mayor Bowser and the National Park Service to delay until after hypothermia season and until every encampment resident is provided with a solution that meets their needs,” said **Jesse Rabinowitz, Manager of The Way Home Campaign and Senior Advocacy Manager at Miriam’s Kitchen.**

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The [National Coalition for Housing Justice](#) (NCHJ) is a group of national organizations that have aligned behind seeking housing justice in order to end homelessness. Our vision of housing justice realizes the right for everyone in our country to have affordable, safe, accessible, and stable housing. We take an approach grounded in racial justice, economic justice, and equity for all who have been marginalized or minoritized.