

May 30, 2017

The Hon. Jorge Elorza
Mayor
Providence City Hall
25 Dorrance Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Mayor Elorza:

As organizations and individuals who have worked for many years to protect the rights of the poor and the homeless, we write to commend you for vowing to veto the ordinance passed by the City Council last Wednesday banning smoking around the Kennedy Plaza area.

We know that, rather than serving as a public health measure, this ordinance will be disproportionately used against the poor and the homeless in an attempt to displace them from this public downtown area.

We know that harried office workers, unable to smoke in their offices, will not be charged under this ordinance when they run downstairs to have a smoke right outside their building – a scene that anybody walking downtown is quite familiar with.

We know that enforcement of an ordinance like this is, as your Commissioner of Public Safety has noted on numerous occasions, a great waste of limited police resources.

First the Council banned smoking in the nearby public parks in an attempt to move the homeless away from those areas. A victim of their own success, Council members now seek to move the homeless away from the Kennedy Plaza area as well. But the downtown area should be a public space for everybody, and this attempt to shuffle the poor around in order to hide the poverty that exists in the City is unseemly and ultimately self-defeating.

Again, we appreciate your stated decision to veto this troubling ordinance. By copy of this letter, we strongly urge the City Council not to override that veto.

Respectfully,

Barbara Freitas, Director
R.I. Homeless Advocacy Project

Laura Jaworski, MSW, Executive Director
The House of Hope CDC

Megan Smith, Chair
Homeless Bill of Rights Committee

Steven Brown, Executive Director
American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island

Fred Ordoñez, Executive Director
Direct Action for Rights and Equality

Kristina da Fonseca, Executive Director
SouthCoast Fair Housing

Andreas Lazaris, Alice Lee, Michael Superdock, Eric Bai, Ligia Fragoso, Emily White
Rhode Island Medical Navigator Partnership, Leadership Board
Warren Alpert Medical School at Brown University

Signing in an Individual Capacity:

Pranav Aurora
George Hanley
Eric Hirsch
Andrew Horwitz
Olivia Meunier

cc: Providence City Council Members