

Statement on the World Athletics Championships from Stop the Sweeps Eugene

Over two years ago, in preparation for hosting the World Athletics Championships (WAC) in the summer of 2020 (when it was originally scheduled), the City of Eugene launched an escalating and relentless offensive against its unhoused residents that began before the pandemic and is still ongoing. World athletics events are meant to showcase the pinnacle of human ability; it's too bad that it's always about sports and endurance and never kindness or compassion. The City of Eugene has instead resorted to terrorizing unhoused residents out of sight or into jail; impounding their RVs, trailers and cars; stealing their tents, belongings, and pets; and pushing them further away from services and resources needed to survive. Eugene has one of the highest per capita rates of homelessness in the nation; there is no city-run shelter in Eugene; and there is no alternative place for people to go. Homelessness is not a choice people make, despite the City's twisted narrative to the contrary.

The City of Eugene has effectively disregarded the CDC's recommendations to allow unhoused folks to shelter in place during the pandemic. In fact, the numbers show that evictions perpetrated against the unhoused by Parks and Open Space staff and the Eugene Police Department have actually *increased* significantly since 2019. At the same time, the City has been gifting to developers publically owned buildings and parks land, taxpayer funded subsidies, and millions of dollars in tax credits for luxury developments, while rent skyrockets and fewer and fewer people can afford what little affordable housing is available.

In the eight months leading up to the WAC, the City shut down the only sanctioned encampments in Eugene, where at least 500 people lived at one time. To justify the closure of these encampments, the City contracted with St. Vincent De Paul (SVDP) to offer about 80 beds in a temporary, carceral-like setting to a fraction of those forcefully removed out of the encampments. The City continues to forcefully evict the thousands of unhoused residents in Eugene who were not offered a spot at the SVDP sites. No one has ever been able to tell people being evicted a place where they could safely shelter, because it is illegal for unhoused folks to sit, lie, sleep or exist **anywhere** in Eugene.

Such "sweeps" were to "clean up" the city, in preparation for a ten-day international athletic event, to hide Eugene's poorest citizens instead of helping them. Sweeps are not a "clean up." Sweeps are forced evictions, confiscations, citations, arrests, and the destruction of people's entire lives. The City of Eugene and State of Oregon have poured tens of millions of dollars into hosting a ten-day track event. It costs about \$100k - \$150k to build a unit of permanent supportive housing. Those tens of millions of dollars spent on a sporting event could have been spent to provide permanent supportive housing to hundreds of Eugene residents who sleep outside every night. Additionally, the millions of dollars the City has spent on sweeps and enforcement of the litany of anti-homeless laws should have also been used to house people. What if even a fraction of the money spent on luxury developments, luxury sports, and criminalizing

homelessness in Eugene over the past few years was instead used for permanent housing affordable for folks with no income or very low income?

Whether living in their car or in a tent, people need legal, safe places to sleep and engage in daily life-sustaining activities. The sweeps over the past few years leading up to the WAC have been a disgusting effort to harass, disappear, and steal the possessions of the most marginalized members of our community. The abuse of the poor by the City is a abomination and a crime against humanity and has only served to make living conditions worse for anyone who is not wealthy in Eugene. Members of Stop the Sweeps Eugene are heartbroken and disgusted to see the City government spend public money to brutalize our neighbors and lie to the greater Eugene community and its visitors about what it is up to.