



# Tacoma Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness

<https://pchomeless.org/> - [info@pchomeless.org](mailto:info@pchomeless.org)

April 16, 2021

To: Sheriff Ed Troyer  
Members of the Pierce County Council

Living unsheltered in Pierce County is dangerous. This winter, two individuals experiencing homelessness were killed by their housed neighbors. Harassment, theft, physical and sexual assault are a constant danger, particularly at night. One common safety strategy for people experiencing homelessness is to remain awake and traveling during the evening. It is also important to note that simply being a person of color is far too often a contributing factor in being identified by law enforcement as a "suspicious person" leading to unnecessary interventions.

Considering the vulnerability of persons of color as well as those experiencing homelessness, the actions of Sheriff Troyer on January 27, 2021 are of great concern. Creating an incident where none existed significantly escalated the situation to a substantial police response.

When the 911 dispatcher asked if the individual was armed, Sheriff Troyer responded that he did not know, but the driver "looked homeless." In describing the vehicle, Sheriff Troyer characterized it as "old homeless-looking." This type of profiling is disappointing. Research does not show a clear relationship between homelessness and violent crime<sup>1</sup>. Having the highest-ranking law enforcement officer in the County contribute to this misconception will end poorly for our unhoused neighbors. Incidents such as this one created by Sheriff Troyer can easily end in injury or death – especially when officers arrive with weapons drawn, as Mr. Alzheimer reported.

People experiencing homelessness in Pierce County need all the protections our community can muster, including police and sheriff responses that do not bias their response when someone is assumed to be homeless.

Sheriff Troyer, please reflect on your lapse of judgement that escalated a night at work for a delivery driver into a potentially life-threatening encounter. It is your responsibility to ensure you and the officers you oversee deescalate violent encounters, not create them. Please recognize the opportunity for further training.

Pierce County Councilmembers, we support your investigation of this incident and hope that recommendations coming from it will be implemented as new policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Fischer, Sean N, et al. "Homelessness, Mental Illness, and Criminal Activity: Examining Patterns Over Time." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 42, 2008, pp. 251–265., doi:10.1007/s10464-008-9210-z.



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Sincerely,

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CC Pierce County Executive  
Pierce County Human Services  
City of Tacoma Mayor  
Tacoma City Council  
City of Tacoma Neighborhood and Community Services

DRAFT