Community Calls for Real Solutions to Address Housing Crisis 
After Mass Sweep of Unhoused Individuals

[MEDFORD, OREGON] In the twilight hours of Thursday, September 30, 2021, the Medford Police Department Livability Team, in partnership with the Jackson County Sheriff Department and Rogue Retreat’s Clean Sweeps program, removed an estimated dozen individuals suffering from either chronic homelessness and/or displacement from the 2020 wildfires at Hawthorne Park in Medford, Ore. The actions were the result of 72-hour “eviction notices” served on Monday, September 27, 2021 around 7:30 am. Despite not being able to legally touch any items before 7:30 am, the MPD and Jackson County Sheriff Department arrived at 6:30 am to cordon off the area with yellow tape, which delayed local mutual aid volunteers from providing resources and support to the unhoused individuals facing displacement. Regardless, mutual aid volunteers were able to engage with the police to ensure no arrests were made during the sweep.

Over the next hour, the Livability Team removed at least two individuals by car to take them to a local shelter. One individual was told he could stay at the local Gospel Mission shelter, where he had allegedly been kicked out of a few weeks before. “He is an elderly man who can barely stand up on his own,” says Kayla Wade, Logistics Director of the Southern Oregon Coalition for Racial Equity (SOEquity). “I gave him my number and he called me a couple of hours later on the verge of tears because the shelter he was placed at did not have room for him to stay the night, out of the cold.” SOEquity reserved a hotel room for this individual for the night but does not have the funds to house him long term.

At the same time individuals with nowhere else to go were being told that they were in violation of the law, the Thursday Farmer’s Market was being set up. Of the community members interviewed by two local activists, no one knew that the sweeps were even happening that morning. “We have evidence that the reason the sweeps even happened in the first place were because of an event that happened on September 22, 2021 that encouraged unhoused people to put up tents and keep them there,” Wade adds. Keeping tents up during the daytime is against Medford Municipal Code 5.257, which in part states that “Camping, lying, or sleeping... fundamentally undermines the public’s ability to use that public property for its intended purpose” and is therefore grounds for arrest.

“We have a right to rest. We have a right to exist,” says one unhoused man, affectionately known as ‘Hobo Dave.’ “I invite any cop, lawyer, elected official or reporter to come and stay a week with me out on the streets. And then we can talk about how to deal with us.”
SOEquity is now asking for donations to provide cold weather gear for unhoused individuals this weekend. "We need tarps, backpacks, handwarmers, and water-resistant clothes and shoes to help people survive this transition in weather," says Mars Hints, Project Manager for SOEquity. "As someone who has been chronically unhoused, I know how hard it is to survive outside in harsh weather conditions. Our community has to act to make sure no one dies this winter."

SOEquity will be collecting donations for cold-weather items at Hawthorne Park between 11am and 2pm from Friday, October 1 to Sunday October 3, 2021. Members outside of the area or those who wish to donate funds can find instructions for contribution at www.soequity.org/donate. After Sunday, SOEquity plans to establish more consistent gear drives for the local unhoused community.

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