

## **STATEMENT FROM THE FAITH AND ADVOCACY COALITION TO END HUNGER AND HOMELESSNESS, AND OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS, ABOUT THE MORAL IMPERATIVE TO BEGIN BUILDING HOUSING AND SCALING UP SERVICES TO END HOMELESSNESS BEFORE THE WINTER OLYMPICS RETURN TO UTAH IN 2034**

We are writing to you as clergy and lay people from a variety of faith traditions, and other concerned citizens, in anticipation of the beginning of the 2026 general session of the Utah Legislature. Our message is simple, if Utah does not immediately begin making serious efforts to produce the housing, and appropriate services, to end homelessness then it will soon be too late to avoid the shame of inviting the world's elite to visit Utah during the 2034 Olympic Games at a time when the total unsheltered homeless population is double what it is today.

For the past ten years the discussion about homelessness has been overly focused on efforts to build better homeless shelters. It is important to have safe and clean places indoors for people to sleep in but homeless shelters do not cause people to become homeless and the nonprofit organizations that operate homeless shelters do not have the resources to produce the thousands of deeply affordable housing units that are needed to help people move out of homelessness and not return to homelessness. These four facts should help make the need for diverse types of deeply affordable housing, with appropriate supportive services, clear to all:

- **10,261 people became homeless for the first time in Utah in 2024.** We will never be able to build enough shelter beds if we do not have housing and services to move all of those people out of the system as fast as possible,
- **1,091 people with autism, or another developmental disability, were homeless in Utah in 2024.** Many of those people also had mental health conditions and/or physical disabilities. We have an ethical obligation to identify those who need long term support and to provide that help in a way that allows them to live with dignity and opportunities to develop meaningful social connections.
- **Fourteen percent of the people who were homeless in Utah in 2024 were children.** Homelessness prevention is always cheaper than the cumulative cost of attempting to ameliorate homelessness and address the long-term consequences homelessness can have on physical and emotional well-being.
- **The number of homeless people older than 64 who were identified in Utah's Point In Time Count increased by 42 percent in 2024.** Without a serious focus on preventing senior homelessness we risk having our entire homeless system becoming overwhelmed as the Baby Boomer generation becomes increasingly unable to work and more reliant on Social Security to pay for basic necessities.

The Salt Lake Valley Coalition to End Homelessness has produced a helpful analysis of the types of housing and services that would need to be produced over a four-year period to reduce homelessness to a manageable level. This analysis can serve as backbone for creating a statewide plan that can be used to galvanize broad support for action in time to reduce homelessness before the 2034 Olympic Games. We ask you to join us in acknowledging our collective responsibility to work to end homelessness in our state for seniors, families with children, youth, people with developmental disabilities, people with physical disabilities, people with serious mental illness and people with substance use disorders.

**Signed by:** *Crossroads Urban Center, Holladay United Church of Christ, the Nomad Alliance, Powerful Moms Who Care, the Faith and Advocacy Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness, the Utah Housing Coalition, the Utah Valley Interfaith Association and more than 230 individuals.*