

“Street homelessness” can be defined as living on the street or another place not meant for human habitation. “Tent Cities” or “Encampments” have been a common symbol of people experiencing street homelessness throughout Chicago and other major cities. If elected, how would you address street homelessness?



AMARA ENYIA

“We need to expand the availability of shelter beds, increase access to transitional housing units, and connect those who can work with career training and jobs that will lead to sustainable wages. I understand that not everyone who lives outside wants to enter the shelter system, and we need to address the underlying issues for that—whether it be the result of a mental health condition or unsafe, unsanitary conditions in emergency housing. In the cold conditions we need now, we also need to address accessibility for the city warming shelters as well.

Through requirements outlined in the consent decree, our police will soon be better trained on how to recognize and respond to mental health-related incidents. I believe this will lead to better treatment of our homeless population. We cannot simply arrest and send homeless individuals to jail or seize and dispose of their belongings—we must work to prevent as many Chicagoans as possible from sleeping in dangerous conditions and contributing to public health and safety concerns. All people deserve to be treated with dignity.”



LASHAWN FORD

“We will give more support for street outreach teams dealing with severe mental illness and substance use disorder. More funding will come for programs like Franciscan Casa in Pilsen, where people living in encampments on Lower Wacker Drive or on Des Plaines are offered low-barrier, safe housing with 24/7 care management support with a harm reduction approach dealing with substance use disorders. We will incentivize the rehab of the many abandoned buildings on the West and South Sides to turn them into affordable, supportive housing. We will push for legislation like I introduced in the last GA that would create the Access to Affordable, Permanent, and Supportive Housing and Services Act, allowing Chicago to provide housing and supportive services to people experiencing homelessness in public spaces. Housing is also health care, and we will work with Illinois DHS, HFS and managed care organizations to direct money toward supportive housing for persons with severe medical/mental health issues. Working with experts employed by agencies who do this work every day, listening to people who experience homeless themselves, using evidence-based research, and modifying our response to the needs of those most in need will be our approach.”



LORI LIGHTFOOT

“Helping people experiencing street homelessness begins with a vision for a more equitable Chicago. The way that Chicago treats our homeless is an absolute sin. In order to prevent and end street homelessness, there a number of things that must be done. First, to ensure an equitable future for housing in Chicago, we must commit to building affordable housing in every neighborhood in Chicago. By limiting aldermanic prerogative, and doubling the mandates in the Affordable Requirements Ordinance (ARO), we can ensure that more affordable housing is being built across the city. In addition, the dedicated funding stream from the proposed progressive Real Estate Transfer Tax will go directly to homelessness services, including social and mental health services.

But to bring people out of street homelessness, we must provide low- and no-cost transitional housing, like what has been done with some Single Resident Occupancy developments. In order to preserve and expand our supply of SROs, we can develop a Qualified Allocation Plan, or QAP, for developer tax credits. Chicago, unlike the state of Illinois, does not use QAPs. This is problematic for several reasons. First, there is a lack of transparency over how housing proposals are selected. This means affordable housing developers who submit proposals to the city do not know how their proposals compare with the competition or why their proposals were not funded and competing ones were. Second, the failure to use an objective numerical scoring system opens the selection process to political influence. Third, not using QAPs prevents the city from awarding points to development activity that advances the city’s housing priorities, such as supportive housing, housing for people with special needs and/or disabilities, or which preserve single room occupancy buildings. I believe that with these plans, we can work to end street homelessness, and help bring all Chicagoans into a life with shelter, community, and dignity.”



SUSANA MENDOZA

“Street homelessness is dangerous for the safety and health of those that sleep on the street. It will be my priority to improve our street outreach efforts, and emergency shelter systems. A recent study shows that the access to homeless system is neither coordinated nor efficient. First responders and 311 operators did not provide referrals, and the outreach teams were often not informed about resources available for individuals they found on the street. As mayor, I will work to coordinate and expand outreach and engagement resources to create a universal approach and coverage throughout the city. I will also create system capacity for real-time bed management and the electronic transfer of client information for seamless continuity of care. We also need to earmark more dollars for targeted diversion efforts to intercept those who are most at risk of becoming homeless.”



TONI PRECKWINKLE

“Many of these same affordable housing and economic development proposals can help to address street homelessness and provide needed sustainable shelter and opportunity to the homeless population. Furthermore, law enforcement should be trained to recognize when individuals in tents or encampments are at risk of danger, from weather or other factors, and refer them to a shelter or safe place.”



WILLIE WILSON

“A tent is not a home. A box is not a home. A home is a place with a roof, windows, running water, a bathroom. I do not see any difference between people sleeping on the sidewalk and those sleeping in a tent. All of them are homeless. All of them need our helping hand. As I described above, we will begin by using vacant properties of the city and move on to construction of a facility (s) that makes sense. City owned SRO’s or similar options are possibilities.”