

## Chaos isn't compassion. It's time to restore order in Anchorage

### COMMENTARY

Keith McCormick, Jared Goecker and Scott Myers

Anchorage is at a crossroads. We have reached a point of normalizing the sprawling, unauthorized encampments that have taken over many of our public spaces. They cause serious harm to both the neighborhoods they spring up in and to the campers themselves, who often become trapped in cycles of addiction and dysfunction. There is no version of these camps that promotes well-being.

They are fundamentally incompatible with healthy lives and with a healthy city.

For too long, neighborhoods and public spaces have been taken over by encampments where drug use is rampant, women are being trafficked in plain sight, people are being murdered and hurt, and our parks, meant for children and families, are rendered unsafe. Anchorage's timid, accommodating response to encampments is not mercy. It is not tolerance. It is abandonment. And it has allowed this problem to grow into a crisis.

That's why we introduced AO 202574, an ordinance that clearly prohibits camping on public property and makes such conduct a Class B misdemeanor.

This ordinance empowers our city to take swift, lawful action to restore public order while upholding the due process rights of individuals. This ordinance also gives the city the ability to divert people into mandatory rehab and treatment, a tool desperately needed to help break the cycle of addiction that has destroyed so many lives.

This is not about punishing people for being homeless. We want services and support to be available to those who will take advantage of them. This is about drawing a firm line against the chaos unfolding in full view of all. This

is about protecting the vulnerable — from residents afraid to let their children walk to school, to the individuals being trafficked or slowly dying in tents, out of sight and out of hope. Failing to act in the face of this growing crisis would not be compassionate; it would be cruel.

We've crafted AO 2025-74 in line with the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, which confirmed that municipalities have the right to regulate public spaces. Our ordinance focuses on conduct, not status. It is not illegal to be homeless, but it is no longer acceptable to turn our city's greenbelts, sidewalks and bus stops into sites of criminal activity and human misery.

Enforcement is not the enemy of compassion. In fact, it is the first step toward real help. No outreach team can succeed in an environment where lawlessness is tolerated. No detox bed, housing program or shelter expansion will make a dent if we continue sending the message that anything goes in Anchorage's public spaces.

We know this ordinance won't solve everything overnight. But we also know that the hands-off approach adopted by the city in the past hasn't worked. The result has been more deaths, more fires, more violence, more decay and a city in decline. It is time we acknowledge what everyone else sees plainly: this approach has failed. We need a reset. AO 2025-74 is that reset.

Let's stop pretending that tolerance of public camping is kindness or acting as if we can't do anything about it. We need to recognize the problem, take action to fix it and start building a better, safer, and more dignified Anchorage together.

The public will have a chance to weigh in on this ordinance at the regular Assembly meeting at 6 pm on June 24 at the Loussac Library. We encourage everyone to show up, speak out and help us confront this issue with the seriousness it demands.

Keith McCormick, Jared Goecker and Scott Myers are members of the Anchorage Assembly. McCormick represents South Anchorage, Girdwood and the Turnagain Arm area. Goecker and Myers represent the Eagle River/ Chugiak area.



A person walks through the homeless camp near the snow dump across Mountain View Drive from Davis Park on June 16. **BILL ROTH / ADN**