[Add your address]

Dear Louisville Metro Council Member,

[Thank the council member if they did support the insurance premium tax increase (see email for list).] You now have a very difficult job ahead to create a balanced Metro Government budget that must now include $35 million in cuts without making too many sacrifices to public safety. In order to make that possible, I want to make sure you know that public safety includes agencies who serve the poor and homeless.

[If you work or volunteer for an agency, add information about what they do to serve the poor and homeless, how many are at risk, and the effects of not providing this public service.]

Homeless agencies work hand in hand with local police, Public Works, and Public Health, all of whom work hard to address a rising drug crisis, disease outbreaks, and increased refuge on our streets resulting from increased street homelessness—all without an increase in resources. These services are invaluable and literally save lives. But homeless shelter and services also save lives and address issues of public safety:

[Create your own bullet for what you think is important to save or pick and choose from the list below.]

* Louisville’s shelters are overflowing the 618 beds available each evening (including the low-barrier shelter at Wayside, now limited to 100 beds). Even on White Flag nights when space is opened for 160 more, we have people sleeping outside. And, in early April when White Flag shut down because of better weather, thirty families with small children found themselves with no place to go. We know people are more vulnerable on the streets and see dozens die each year from exposure and violence.
* The addiction crisis is taking lives and creating homelessness. Our city needs additional drug-assisted treatment and cannot afford to lose the VOA mobile van that provides needle exchange throughout the city. This effort led by a quick response from our Public Health Department helped to save our city from the Hep A crisis while the rest of the Commonwealth is still struggling with the issue. Meanwhile, Home of the Innocents allows many of those who need recovery services to do so by housing and caring for their children while they are in treatment allowing the parent to get help and keeping many small children off the streets.
* Local research has shown that supportive housing with supports like that offered by Wellspring and others actually saves the community $16,000 per person per year in health and safety costs. Lou, a 56 year old man with a history of mental illness, addiction and COPD, lived on the streets for years creating high unpaid costs in health care facilities and hospitals as well as the local jail. Thanks to strong support from staff, he has been able to identify triggers and maintain housing in the community at a much lower cost and with better personal outcomes. And, he is one of hundreds now living in safe housing versus our city streets.
* A committee has been meeting for years to address the fact that illegal practices and non-compliance with existing codes in poor neighborhoods make these same neighborhoods poorer and less safe. We know that what is needed for public safety is an increase in code enforcement, not a decrease if we want to address this issue of unchecked recovery housing.
* Louisville’s eviction rate is double that of the national average. This results in low-income citizens, mostly single moms with children, losing their safety net, becoming vulnerable, making dire choices to meet immediate needs, and being forced to live in less and less safe housing because it is all they can afford or acquire due to their eviction records. City funding supports local agencies like Legal Aid and House of Ruth to prevent these evictions, provide expungements, and stop this cycle so that families can stabilize and find work in our community.
* The greatest cost savings our community can create are those that prevent the need for homeless service services in the first place. Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods, Neighborhood Place and Community Ministry programs and community centers help families prevent eviction, violence, and unsafe choices. We cannot afford to pay the price later for eliminating these programs now.

So I am writing as a concerned constituent to say that we cannot afford to lose these life-saving services, which include homeless shelter, outreach, evidenced-based drug treatment, and prevention—which are funded through several city departments, including Resilience and Community Services, as well as the EAF and NDF funding pools.

We all want to live in a safe and healthy neighborhood. Your task will be daunting, but we ask you to think about those in the greatest need throughout our city as you create our city’s budget. Please don’t leave the homeless behind.

Signature