

# Easy Access Housing

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Oral submission regarding total liquor ban for Wellington City

May 20, 2010

Good morning

I'm Susan Gordon coordinator of Easy Access Housing. We provide temporary transitional housing for homeless people who have experience of mental unwellness.

Along with me today to offer her support is Sister Catherine Hannon of the Compassion Centre and The Soup Kitchen.

First I'd like to thank The Committee for hearing this oral submission. We all know the disorder and harm that results from drinking and it's unpleasant effect on public spaces has not been eliminated by the partial ban now in place. It therefore follows that a city wide alcohol ban won't work either. All anyone has to do is to visit Courtnaey Place. On just about any night you'll see drunken and disorderly behavior displayed by men and women of all ages. People stumbling, people bumbling. People shouting and acting in a lewd and inappropriate manner. It's New Zealand's binge drinking culture on parade. And by the way Courtnaey Place is in the middle of an area already banned.

If a total ban is imposed the people Sister Catherine and I work with every day will be affected greatly. I'm referring to people who are homeless.

People, many of whom don't have good social skills. People who don't have access to the facilities that most of us take for granted. I'm speaking about Wellingtonians who don't have homes. Citizens who will be greatly affected by this ban. People who unlike ourselves are not able to frequent pubs, restaurants and cafes. People who don't have homes in which to drink and socialize. These people will be affected greatly.

In The Council's Project Margin reports it states that and I quote "Challenges continue to emerge in addressing the needs of a group of people who are traditionally hard to house and have multiple and complex needs often associated with drugs and alcohol" end quote. In the past the council has taken a lead role in addressing this issue. I'd like to acknowledge this good work.

The nature of drinking is a social pursuit. People come together to drink. I know none of us want people to lose their homes. Unfortunately a total

ban will result in just that. In order to comply with the ban homeless people are already putting pressure on their friends with housing to allow drinking in their flats. The results are tragic. People are losing their tenancies. Their losing their WCC & HNZ accomodation. Not only are otherwise good tenants losing their homes but their neighbours are affected as well. The noise and anti social behavior spills out into the common areas. The quiet enjoyment that tenants have a right to expect is being interrupted. It's a no win situation.

That's why we ask that Council provide dedicated outdoor drinking areas. Areas where homeless people can drink together in safety. Areas where outreach services can operate. Contained areas serving some of Wellington's most marginalized citizens. We believe the areas need to be near the CBD. There would need to be toilets available nearby and rubbish bins. The areas would need to be monitored for security purposes. We don't have all the answers but we'd like the opportunity to work them out with you. We know that there will be an initial investment needed but it will be money well spend. The money saved by Wellington will be considerable. There will be fewer arrests. This will free up the police who are already stretched to attend to other crimes being committed and not responded to in a timely fashion. There will be fewer visits to the hospital emergency room. There will be less damage to property. So maintenance costs and callouts will be reduced. The advantages are significant.

Since the partial ban some of the people who used to drink in Glover Park have been seen drinking in parks in Newtown. This exemplifies the fact that homeless people do not want to break the law. They have consciously moved their activities to an area where alcohol is not banned. They don't want to be arrested. They don't want to be criminalized. If they didn't care they would not have moved from Glover Park. If there is no area where they can legally drink then they might as well drink any and everywhere. Designated drinking areas would reduce and contain the problem we now see in suburban Wellington.

We need to be forward thinking. It's unrealistic to expect people who have been drinking for a long time to stop. In a perfect world this wouldn't be the case. But the world isn't perfect. You as the stewards of this city have the power to make it better. You can pass laws that make sense. You can crate designated outdoor drinking areas for the citizens you serve. The citizens whose voice is not loud but whose needs are profound.

And while we're asking the council for it's support we'd like to suggest that the Council provide or help create a wet house. A permanent place where drinkers can live in peace. I have had some experience managing a wet house in the United States. I would be happy to speak with any of you who are interested in exploring this idea further. I know we were quite a way's down the track to creating a wet house already. Please don't let that idea die.

One of the concerns made to justify the total ban is the number of broken bottles in our streets. We think The Council should consider having a refundable deposit paid on each glass bottle sold in the city. A deposit would go a long way in reducing the number of broken bottles in our streets.

We'd like to thank The Council for it's dedication to improving the lives of Wellington's homeless. We believe that outdoor designated drinking areas will reduce problems created by homeless people who drink. We need a wet house urgently. And we'd like you to seriously consider a refundable deposit on glass bottles.

Wellington is a great place to live. We have a responsibility to consider our most marginalized citizens whenever we pass laws. Any society is judged by how it treats the people who have the weakest voice.

The binge drinking culture is a national problem. The only way to address it is through education. We need to educate children before they think they know everything. Education has worked to reduce smoking and it will work on alcohol too. But it takes time. A ban on advertising alcohol would help. But there is no quick fix. Like with every journey, it starts with the first step.

On behalf of The soup Kitchen and Sister Catherine I would like to invite you and any other member of The Council to visit The Soup Kitchen. On behalf of Mike Leon the manager of The Night Shelter I would like to extend an invitation to you and The Council to visit there as well. If you'd like to see either The Soup Kitchen or The Night Shelter I am happy to arrange a visit.

Thank you for your time.

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