

Testimony submitted in support of City Council Bill 7
Feb. 24, 2010

By Connie Mitchell, Executive Director for IHS, The Institute for Human Services

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My name is Connie Mitchell and I am the Executive Director of the Institute for Human Services which operates two homeless shelters in urban Honolulu and I am here to offer testimony in support of Bill 7 Relating amendments made to Chapter 10 Article 1 Revised Ordinances of Honolulu related to the Department of Parks and Recreation. In particular, I stand in support of a new definition of "tent" and also section 10-1.2 which also prohibits the constructing of said tents in the park without permit.

It is sad that language so explicit needs to be added to clarify the intent of the rules that govern park use. But, the behaviors of many persons who have chosen to camp and live in the parks without permits have made these amendments necessary. Conversely, many chronic homeless people who suffer mental illnesses and other disabilities may wander in our parks and rightly evoke the public's compassion because of their inability to control their behavior. While we hope many chronically homeless and mentally ill persons will respond to outreach, with the considerable cuts to mental health homeless outreach recently, arrest may become a way treatment becomes a possibility for them. Many other people choose to live in parks and beaches because there is currently no consequence for laying claim to a piece of real estate for personal use and violating the intent for parks and beaches to be places of common access and enjoyment for all residents. When such individuals choose to camp without a permit, and continue living in the park indefinitely in lieu of making the effort to seek employment or a lifestyle that honors a sense of community, they appear to be operating from a purely self-centered perspective without regard for others' rights to also enjoy the park or beach.

It is quite apparent that we have much to do to promote more equity when it comes to housing those who have the least in our community. Ours is not a perfect system and not everyone has access to equal opportunity. But, that should not be justification for anarchy to reign in our parks and beaches.

IHS and other homeless service providers stand ready to work with police in offering park users an option for shelter, hot meals, hot showers, medical care and behavioral health treatment. Closing the door to the option of camping in the park will likely surface more challenges with increased arrests of a wide variety of campers. My hope is that the courts can be enlisted to triage those arrested so they are directed to the service most appropriate to their circumstances. For the mentally ill, jail diversion would be appropriate if the person is willing to accept treatment. If drug affected, drug court or serving some time with treatment might be good options. If simply defying the laws and ordinances of the city is at the heart of an arrest, some hours of community service could be very appropriate.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts.

Testimony for Bill 8 pertaining to shopping carts
February 24, 2010
Submitted by Connie Mitchell, IHS The Institute for Human services

IHS supports the ban on shopping carts being parked, used or occupied in the park. While they are often used by homeless people to carry their possessions with them, they are also frequently stolen from many establishments. We support the ban on shopping carts which have been used to construct temporary structures for people who choose not to dwell in more traditional shelter or housing. Setting these limits could help motivate some homeless persons to consider emergency shelter if the park and beach living is a less viable option.

We ask that HPD collaborate with homeless services providers to develop an implementation plan that would promote the most constructive outcomes and least trauma for those affected.

Again, it would be helpful for homeless resources to collaborate with police as a resource for any suspected mentally ill homeless persons as police have been trained to identify potential consumers.

Thank you