

# SURREY STEALS FROM THE HOMELESS! WE WON'T TAKE IT ANymore!

Every day in Surrey, police and bylaw officers steal homeless people's belongings. The physical toll is immense. Surviving outside is hard enough, but when you have no tent, bedding, or warm clothes, it is nearly impossible. The psychological and emotional toll is just as great. It is not only our belongings that we lose; police and bylaw officers steal our freedom and dignity as well.

When police or bylaw officers steal our belongings, they try to blame us by calling us "disorderly" or "aggressive," or by saying that we are moving too slowly or have too much stuff. But when we experience theft, it is not our fault as individuals. The Surrey Street Council has surveyed 39 members of the Surrey street community and found that 85% have lost belongings to police, bylaw, private security, or social workers. This is not an individual issue; it is a systemic problem.

Every instance of theft by police and bylaw officers is a *collective punishment* against homeless people as a group. Every time they steal from one of us and get away with it, they bolster their power and normalize the brutality they enact against us all.

But it is also true that every instance of theft is an opportunity for *collective resistance*: a chance to name and expose police and bylaw brutality and fight back by any means necessary.

## RALLY AND PRESS CONFERENCE

Thursday, March 4th at 12:00pm

Outside SUMS, 10776 King George Blvd

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# THE FIGHT AGAINST BYLAW THEFT IS A FIGHT AGAINST GENTRIFICATION

The City of Surrey endows individual bylaw officers with the power to seize and dispose of homeless people's belongings if they believe those items are "garbage." As the manager of Community Enforcement, Martin Blais, said, "If we think it's garbage, it immediately goes into a disposal vehicle." Once items are thrown away, there is no opportunity to retrieve them.

Martin Blais attempted to justify this incredible power by claiming that bylaw officers are a benevolent force. "You have to remember the Outreach Team works with these people closely. They know what is precious to them," he said. But if that's true, they just don't care. The so-called Outreach Team, made up of police and bylaw officers, routinely disposes of homeless people's precious belongings, including ID, medication, family photographs, work equipment, and even family member's ashes.

The City of Surrey endows bylaw officers with sweeping powers. Martin Blais explained that if somebody is violating bylaws, trespassing, or obstructing sidewalks or streets, bylaw officers "could technically seize all of their belongings." But in practice, they use their power to target homeless people who are forced to survive in public space.

City of Surrey policies, which allow for the routine theft of homeless people's belongings by police and bylaw officers, contravene Section 7 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which guarantees the right to security of the person and property. The message from the City of Surrey is that poor people have no rights.

The underlying purpose of police and bylaw theft is to push homeless people into hiding, out of Surrey, or into early deaths, so that City Hall and developers can build million dollar condo towers on top of our graves. The fight against police and bylaw theft is a fight against the gentrification of our neighbourhoods and for the survival of our low-income communities.

**WE DEMAND** *the immediate end of police and bylaw theft; secure storage lockers for every unhoused person in Surrey; and permanent social housing with rights under the RTA for every unhoused and underhoused person living in BC.*

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