



**City of Seattle**  
Mayor Jenny A. Durkan

January 24, 2019

Councilmember Kshama Sawant  
Seattle City Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Councilmember Sawant,

This letter is to again reiterate our request that you move forward with an actual confirmation hearing for Jason Johnson as the permanent Director of the Human Services Department (HSD).

Jason has been in the role of Interim Director since last May. Since that time, he has improved a range of programs at HSD, continues to meet with numerous providers and stakeholders, and has worked tirelessly to make Seattle a more compassionate and equitable City. He was nominated in December. Despite numerous requests and inquiries by this administration, you have yet to schedule a confirmation hearing with Jason. It is unacceptable that you would delay filling a key position tasked with assisting our most vulnerable and overseeing the City's homelessness response, a defining issue of our time.

Jason, who was previously a social worker, had most recently served as Deputy Director of HSD before becoming Interim Director. He is a collaborative and experienced leader who has overseen the HSD team as they have served Seattle's children, seniors, people with disabilities, and families through the City's many programs. His dedication to the Department and his support from leaders across our community made it clear he was the right choice to lead the Human Services Department. The Mayor was proud to appoint a LGBTQ leader who understands and has focused on LGBTQ youth and seniors as well as the disproportionate impacts of homelessness on LGBTQ individuals.

When Catherine Lester had left the role to care for her family, Jason stepped in as the Interim Director with her full support. Catherine had also previously served as Interim Director before being appointed to the permanent position. Because of the critical role HSD plays in equity, the Mayor wanted to see how Jason did in the job and ensure his work aligned with what she had heard were priorities in the dozens of community and stakeholder meetings and events she had held with those in the human services field. In addition, Jason met with many providers, stakeholders, community partners. Through all of this, the Mayor received extremely positive

feedback from organizations, community members, and providers. She heard very clearly that Jason has been an active leader to create a stronger, just Seattle.

Over the past 10 months, Mayor Durkan has worked closely with Jason on how we best support and make progress to serve people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable communities. Jason oversaw the largest shelter expansion in the City's history which included expansion of services to more LGBTQ households. He has also helped make our homelessness response more effective to serve those communities more disproportionately impacted by our crisis. And as we continue down the path towards a regional structure and approach to the homelessness crisis, Jason's continued leadership and support will be essential.

Homelessness is only a portion of the critical services that HSD provides. Jason is also ensuring that we're serving our seniors, youth, victims of gender based violence, and our most vulnerable populations. Meanwhile, despite serving as Chair of the Human Services, Equitable Development & Renter Rights Committee that oversees HSD's work, you have unfortunately cancelled your monthly meetings with the Mayor to discuss these issues and also have declined multiple times to meet with Jason until last week. Jason has routinely met with other Councilmembers during his time as Interim Director.

As you know, nominating department directors is an Executive function, and power lies with Council to determine whether to confirm the nominee. Each search process is unique. Mayor Durkan worked to ensure we have the most qualified, diverse cabinet and in fact, we have created more inclusive search processes than any Mayor in recent history. In addition, Mayor Durkan has either reappointed or appointed – and you have unanimously confirmed – a series of candidates this past year including Andres Mantilla, Director of the Department of Neighborhoods; Ben Noble, City Budget Office Director; Lily Wilson-Codega, Office of Intergovernmental Relations; Marty Garfinkel, the Director Office of Labor Standards; and Calvin Goings, Finance and Administrative Services.

While other Councilmembers have quickly worked to schedule confirmations of potential cabinet members addressing our City's most pressing issues, it is unfortunate that your Committee has yet to do so. In fact, your committee has only met twice since August, including one meeting in September and one meeting last week. Then, with no meaningful notice, you scheduled a special Council hearing without extending an opportunity to have Jason to attend and speak to his qualifications and ability to lead the Human Services Department for all of Seattle.

Under the Durkan administration, the Council has moved forward with well-qualified department director nominees appointed by the Mayor. Jason is no exception. Jason's five years of experience in HSD, his previous experience in the provider community and his dedication the City make him well suited and qualified to serve in this role. Because of his work in the community, he has already received support from African Community Housing & Development, Chief Seattle Club, Accelerator YMCA, and Plymouth Housing Group, and others.

We look forward to you finally scheduling a meaningful hearing with Jason regarding his appointment as the permanent director of the Human Services Department in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony Auriemma". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Anthony Auriemma  
Director of Legislative Affairs, Mayor's Office