

Dear Members of the Atascadero City Council,

I am writing to express my strong support regarding the updated language in the city ordinance relating to camping in the areas of the city of Atascadero. I strongly urge the City Council to adopt updates to the language that will significantly strengthen & enforce bans on camping in additional specified areas within our beloved city.

For several years, my neighbors and I have been living alongside the homeless encampment, and the experience has been nothing short of distressing. The constant screaming, yelling, fighting, and cussing at all hours of the day and night have created an environment of continuous disturbance, often waking myself and my neighbors up at night. These disturbances and nuisances, directly caused by the encampment, have forced many of us to padlock our homes & gates due to fear for our safety and regular theft of our property. Even with these additional measures, the homeless still find ways to steal our belongings.

The health impacts of living next to a Homeless Encampment are also deeply troubling. Human waste on sidewalks, individuals squatting down to relieve themselves in public areas, and the presence of drug paraphernalia, including needles and tiny Ziploc bags, in the streets have become an everyday sight. Cars driving by at all hours of the day, stopping briefly, contribute to the feeling of insecurity. Moreover, we have heard gunshots in our neighborhood on at least two occasions in the past 12 to 18 months, which is a frightening reality we must face. Additionally, our neighborhood has suffered from constant trash & furniture (bulk trash) dumping, as well as carts & other belongings being abandoned in public spaces, on sidewalks and in front of our homes. These unsightly conditions not only affect the aesthetics of our neighborhood but also contribute to the overall sense of unease as we fear retaliation if we are to do anything to them.

Living in our own home has become an ordeal, particularly as an elderly couple. We no longer feel safe spending extended periods of time in our own yards. Even my granddaughter refuses to allow her son to play in our yard due to the encampment feet from our fence. This sentiment is shared by many others in the neighborhood, and it is disheartening that children cannot enjoy the simple pleasure of playing in their own yards.

In conclusion, the issues we face in our neighborhood are just the tip of the iceberg. I can't begin to imagine the broader effects that these encampments have on other neighborhoods, businesses, and parts of our town. I want to acknowledge and applaud the efforts of the City Manager, Mayor, and the Police in addressing this issue over the years. While there have been times of improvement, clean-up, & sanitation, these positive changes are often short-lived. In light of these ongoing challenges, I implore the City Council to approve the updates to the City of Atascadero's municipal code which will strengthen & enforce bans on camping which is crucial for restoring peace and security in our neighborhoods. We cannot continue to endure the disruptions, safety concerns, and health risks associated with the current situation. I urge you to take swift and decisive action to address this pressing issue and make our city a safer and more pleasant place to live.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I trust that you will consider our concerns seriously.

Betty Ramirez