



PRESS RELEASE

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City Will Continue To Protect Free Speech Activities

Advocates say encampment is diverting those in need from available services

SALT LAKE CITY – Mayor Ralph Becker and Salt Lake City Police Chief Chris Burbank reiterate their commitment to ensuring and protecting the essential rights of all residents of the City to peacefully assemble, protest and exercise free speech.

The decision to discontinue allowing overnight camping on public property was precipitated by much more than the tragic death late Thursday night at the Occupy SLC encampment at Pioneer Park.

Since the onset of camping at Pioneer Park, local law enforcement has responded to a dramatically increased amount of criminal activity in the park, and has made over 90 arrests in the area since early October. In addition, a melee involving over 30 people the night before the fatality led to four arrests and marked, along with the elevated criminal activity, an indication that public safety in and around the encampment has become increasingly questionable. Additionally, the amount of human and animal waste, as well as drug paraphernalia, is an escalating public health concern.

Local social service providers and advocates for Salt Lake City's homeless population have decried the contention made by Occupy SLC that the group is somehow providing services not already available in the area. On Friday, Pamela Atkinson, an advocate for Utah's homeless population, addressed the group on this issue.

“Many of our homeless friends have great need, but meeting those needs takes a certain amount of training, education and expertise,” Atkinson said. “We need to take care of our homeless friends in the proper way, with the most expert care that we have and this kind of tent city is not the kind of environment that helps people. You may provide food here and a caring kind of attitude, but that is not sufficient.”

A Salt Lake Tribune story (see it [here](#)), published later on Friday, included statements from shelter operators that confirmed Atkinson's assurance that shelters and social service providers in the area of the Pioneer Park encampment were under capacity and available to provide accommodations and meals.

Salt Lake City works closely with individuals and agencies that provide services to the homeless community. Mayor Becker formed the Committee on Homelessness last year to address the concerns of those who are homeless in Salt Lake City. The committee is comprised of local, county and state representatives, as well as community advocates, and meets regularly with the Mayor.

The City, through allocation of federal dollars, appropriates funding for Emergency Shelter Grants, the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, and the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program. These programs aid those who are homeless those who are at risk of being homeless, and low-income families.

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