



# United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
National Mall and Memorial Parks  
900 Ohio Drive, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20024-2000

March 24, 2022

Wayne Turnage  
Deputy Mayor for the District of Columbia Health and Human Services  
Director, District of Columbia Department of Health Care Finance  
441 4th Street, NW, 900S  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Deputy Mayor Turnage,

The National Park Service (NPS) has determined that unsheltered encampments on park property at 11<sup>th</sup> Street NW and I Street NW and at Columbus Circle pose imminent threats to public health and safety that warrant temporary closure of these areas. We request your support in prioritizing housing assistance and other services for individuals encamped at these locations.

The NPS received numerous reports of drug activity, violence, and unsanitary conditions at 11<sup>th</sup> Street NW and I Street NW and at Columbus Circle. Efforts by U.S. Park Police to interdict illegal activity and make targeted arrests have not remedied these issues. The closure and restoration of these park areas will allow the NPS to ensure the safety of the general public and those living in the encampments. The NPS is committed to working closely with the District of Columbia's Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services (DMHHS) and other District agencies to provide social services and support to people experiencing homelessness. We will coordinate scheduling of the temporary park closures with DMHHS and are requesting that DMHHS arrange housing assistance for unsheltered individuals at these locations. The NPS is concerned that closing these areas without providing housing assistance will exacerbate conditions in nearby areas.

NPS continues to align with current Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance that recommends allowing people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are during the pandemic. Except in specific circumstances, the NPS has continued its approach of encouraging voluntary dispersal of unsheltered encampments. Because the NPS is not a social service provider, we rely on the District and its partners for these services. The NPS is committed to a social services-first approach and will continue to work closely with DMHHS and community partners so people occupying encampments receive appropriate resources and housing.

Even during the pandemic, NPS prioritizes enforcement of its no-camping regulation (36 C.F.R. Section 7.96) in cases of threats to public health and safety. The NPS has determined that it is in the interest of public safety to enforce the no-camping regulation at 11<sup>th</sup> Street NW and I Street NW and Columbus Circle. The NPS has considered information provided by DMHHS, the

Metropolitan Police Department, the U.S. Park Police, and community stakeholders in making the determination to close these two park areas.

The NPS will issue a Record of Determination (ROD) for temporary closure of the park areas at 11<sup>th</sup> Street NW and I Street NW and Columbus Circle, stating the reasons, timing, and duration of the closures. We will provide ample notice of the temporary park closures in alignment with the District's 14-day policy. The NPS will perform documented onsite due diligence of the park closures, including:

- Written and verbal 14-day notice, including a posting of the impending temporary closure of the site at the site itself,
- In-person consultation with individuals at the encampments to provide notice and to determine property ownership,
- Collaboration with DMHHS to ensure the unsheltered community receives the support needed, and
- Consistent communication among the NPS, the District, the unsheltered community, and the public on the timing of the temporary park closure.

Since both the 11<sup>th</sup> Street NW and I Street NW and Columbus Circle encampments represent hazardous or unsafe conditions, the NPS will move to temporarily close these encampments by the beginning of May regardless of whether housing has been identified for unsheltered individuals. The NPS must adhere to the closure schedule due to the imminent threats posed to public health and safety. We appreciate DMHHS' assistance and coordination in meeting NPS' timeframes for these temporary park closures by facilitating safe housing options for people experiencing homelessness at these locations.

I look forward to our continued collaboration on this matter. You can reach me at 202-245-4661.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey P. Reinbold  
Superintendent  
National Mall and Memorial Parks