

Remarks for Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

Friday, December 21, 2018

198 more stars shine down from the heavens tonight. 198 lives cut short. And we know that homelessness is the cause of it. Homelessness is brutal. Those living in shelter are 3-4 times more likely than their housed counterparts to die prematurely. People living on the streets are 10 times likelier than the rest of us to die early. And today we acknowledge that 198 people died too soon – because homelessness is hazardous to the health of individuals experiencing it and to the health of our community.

198 new stars shine down from the heavens tonight. But we remember 198 people – 198 human beings - who lived here among us. Think of someone you knew on this list of names. And if you didn't know any of them, think of someone you've lost in your life. Or someone in your life who's still with you. A best friend. A parent. A sibling. Envision their face. The tone of their voice. Think of the last interaction you had with them. A favorite conversation. A difficult moment. Think of something they achieved in their lives.

Tonight we recognize the humanity of 198 people who were somebody's son or daughter. Someone's mother or father. Someone's sister. Someone's brother. Someone's best friend. We remember them for the human beings they were.

198 new stars shine down from the heavens tonight. But the work ahead of us is not up there in the heavens. It's right here on the ground.

In the names of 198 people who died this year, we must take on the seemingly impossible task of ending homelessness altogether. To do this requires a change in paradigm. A change in goal. Not managing it. Not reducing it. Not making it rare and brief – as we have become fond of saying. But ending it altogether.

Let us commit to a vision in which no one goes to sleep homeless in Baltimore. Not one person. Not one night.

To do that requires that we both *remember* those who died. *Remember* why they died. And also *re-member* the most vulnerable among us – make them part of our community again. We have to do both. Let us *remember* and *re-member* at the same time.

And to do *that* requires that we implement the policies necessary here in Baltimore, in Annapolis, and in Washington to bring everybody in and to leave nobody out.

- Our community is doing really effective outreach work to the most vulnerable among us. But we have to do more of it even more effectively.
- Our community is working to provide access to treatment and comprehensive health care. But we have to do more to get people the care they need when they need it.
- Our community has recognized the connection between living wage employment and overall health and well-being. But we must do more to ensure that jobs are available and that work pays a living wage.
- Our community has recognized that safe, stable, affordable and supportive housing is a primary solution to homelessness. We've recognized that housing is health care. But we have to do more to invest in housing affordable to those who have nothing and the services people need to remain safely housed and off the streets.

The heavens are too full of stars tonight.

Not one person.

Not one night.