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## ***HOUSING ACTION NOW!***

c/o 489 College Street, Suite 205 Toronto M6R 2A3

May 20, 2009

Affordable Housing Committee  
Toronto City Council

Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee,

My name is Brian Eng and I am here today on behalf of Housing Action Now. HAN is a coalition of organizations including seniors' groups, housing organizations, child welfare agencies, faith groups, legal clinics, and tenant and anti-poverty organizations. HAN believes that every person has a right to safe, affordable and well-maintained housing and that governments have a responsibility to do everything possible to implement creative measures for new housing, to preserve existing affordable housing, help tenants understand and enforce their legal rights with respect to housing and to prevent eviction and homelessness wherever possible.

We wish to begin by acknowledging the importance of developing long-term solutions to deal with issues of housing and homelessness. Housing Action Now has called on all levels of government to create national, provincial and local housing strategies. Housing Opportunities Toronto is a valuable attempt by government to address this pressing need for comprehensive, multi-sectoral solutions.

We would also like to commend the City for situating this plan in the context of the larger issues of community development, sustainability and health. Stable, affordable, adequate housing is key to providing better lives for all the residents of Toronto.

However, we are deeply concerned that the plan will fall short of its stated goal of "providing housing opportunities for all". Even if it achieves the objective of assisting 257,000 households to find or keep affordable housing, it will barely make a dent in existing need, let alone the need of a growing population. The most vulnerable and most marginalized of our society will continue to experience housing deprivation. The hidden homeless, families in overcrowded conditions, youth entering the housing market and newcomers are all still likely to experience significant difficulty finding affordable housing.

Over and over again in the last year and a half we have heard that the targets and indicators in this plan are too low. Particularly in the areas of supportive housing and

development of new truly affordable rental, the targets are woefully inadequate. Unless the province comes up with a new housing benefit program it is hard to imagine that this plan will do anything to significantly reduce the waiting lists for subsidized and supportive housing.

The reality of this plan is that will do very little to increase the capacity of the City to achieve its goal of “providing opportunities for all”. Of the approximately 250,000 households that will benefit if it is fully achieved, 90,000 already live in affordable, social housing. While there is no denying that this housing needs renovation and revitalization, this will not provide any additional housing. The repair and revitalization of existing rental stock for an additional 30,000 households will have to be tightly regulated to maintain affordability of this stock. 40,000 households will be eligible for average annual tax cancellation or deferral of \$250.00 per year. 70,000 households would benefit from housing allowance programs if the province contributes 161 million dollars per year – less than \$200 per month per household – which does not go very far to insuring affordability in Toronto. This leaves only about 30,000 households or 3,000 per year that will benefit from new supply.

We recognize that the City has limited resources and that senior levels of government will have to become major contributors to the success of any plan to address housing issues. However, what is lacking in Housing Opportunities Toronto is a bold vision of what could be accomplished if all the partners were fully engaged. In many areas, the plan appears to have opted for the easy, manageable solutions rather than dramatic, effective ones. Easy and manageable may prevent us from slipping more deeply into the housing crisis, but it will not lift us any further toward the goal of providing housing opportunities for all.

The introduction to Housing Opportunities Toronto refers to the plan as a roadmap. All of the signposts seem to indicate that we are about to embark on a long, slow, mainly uphill journey.

Brian Eng  
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