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To: **Community Development and Recreation Committee, Toronto City Council**

DATE: **Wednesday, January 17, 2018**

RE: **Investing in housing to end homelessness**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH).

The TAEH is a collective impact initiative committed to achieving our vision of zero chronic and episodic homelessness in Toronto. This means that the number of people becoming homeless every month will be equal to, or less than, the number of people experiencing homelessness securing good, sustainable housing again.

The state and scope of homelessness in Toronto right now is a serious health and housing crisis. It's cost in human lives, potential and suffering is not an acceptable situation for any just or compassionate society. We know that many of you on this committee, your fellow Councillors, the Mayor and many voices in the community agree.

The TAEH supports the actions taken by the City over the last two months to increase access to immediate emergency shelter and other services. We also urge this committee and Council to continue to include investing in housing solutions as part of the response to our ongoing and long entrenched homelessness crisis.

In fact, we encourage you to do more. Our recommendations for the 2018-2019 budget – submitted last week and included in an appendix below – lay out specific areas for increasing the City's commitment to housing as the main tool for ending homelessness.

It also speaks to the critical role the City has in convening others whose resources are needed. Toronto can build on the stronger relationship it is already developing with the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs). In addition to leveraging the resources of the provincial Homes For Good supportive housing program, the City can engage the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to arrange more provincial funding for supportive housing.

For right now, of course immediate emergency action was and is needed this winter. The current challenges people face in finding good shelter, appropriate health care and other supports demand it.

As we have stated before, however, we cannot address homelessness through an expansion of shelter services alone. While it is true that shelters and the people working in them make a world of difference to the safety, health and well-being of people experiencing homelessness, shelters are not permanent, sustainable long-term solutions to homelessness.

The TAEH vision, the one we welcome you all to share, includes:

- A planning and funding arc that trends increasingly towards a continuum of housing and support solutions that ends chronic and episodic homelessness in Toronto.
- Robust housing options that truly meet the needs of every individual. This means a range of intensity of supports from low to very high.
- A housing process that meets the choices, needs and contexts of each individual so as to better support long-term, successful tenancies.
- A well-coordinated housing access system that matches people's need, priority and choice to available types of housing and supports.
- Enough deeply affordable housing for those at the lowest income levels.

Why do we believe a housing delivery system with these characteristics is the answer?
Consider the following facts:

- Health and other outcomes, including housing retention rates, are improved for people living in good supportive housing.
- The faster a person experiencing homelessness regains housing the lower their chances are of becoming homeless again.
- The shorter someone's experience of homelessness is the lower the longer term effects of their homelessness are.
- The majority of those working directly with people experiencing homelessness in Canada agree, even those calling for more immediate investment in shelter beds, that good housing with supports is the long-term solution to homelessness.
- The Province of Ontario's recent work on supportive housing found that in Ontario we only have half of what we need, even though supportive housing is recognized as a key strategy in ending chronic homelessness. Its own Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council recommends 3000 new supportive housing units annually.
- Other communities in Canada and elsewhere have found success in reducing homelessness through housing. For example, the City of Hamilton exceeded their recent target of housing people experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness, reducing homelessness there by 30% overall. They did this by better understanding people's needs and prioritizing them with available housing and supports.

The best use of public dollars is also in housing. Simply put, the cost of emergency shelters exceeds the cost of housing, even with supports. Operating a single shelter bed (including room, board and programming) costs Toronto \$2,250.00 per month or \$27,000.00 per year. The average cost of providing supportive housing – for moderate supports and scattered site housing – is estimated at \$17,000.00 per year. That is a difference of \$10,000.00 per person per year. Of course, more intensive supportive housing will cost more per person, but it will also ensure a safe, appropriate home for that person instead of a shelter bed. And these numbers are only for shelter versus housing. The savings in investing in housing only go up when compared to the costs of jails or hospitals where some people end up.

Finally, creating new supportive housing options in our city will take the same amount of time it will take to create new shelters. At the last meeting of this committee the 10-year Shelter Infrastructure Plan was approved. It is a sound plan to develop increased capacity through a new shelter model that is more focussed on individualized help to find and keep housing – one that will also see shelter and housing services available in communities across the city and not just in a few clustered areas. It is a good plan and one that meets Toronto's needs, bringing 600-700 permanent new shelter beds in constructive environments on line in 2018.

Conclusion

The next step is for Toronto City Council to commit to more supportive housing, not a large amount of more shelter beds.

We have a rare opportunity to use and leverage provincial Homes For Good funding to provide more housing with supports immediately. We also can maximize the opportunities of the National Housing Strategy. We can be ready with a plan that commits a certain portion of resources to house chronically homeless people and that creates a faster, better coordinated housing delivery system in Toronto. These steps will reduce the need for emergency shelters over all.

There is no doubt that this committee and City Council are grappling with an unhappy, dire situation in regards to homelessness in Toronto. The TAEH supports you in doing the right thing and make decisions that will end homelessness rather than just manage it.

For more information:

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Appendix: Recommendations for 2018-2019 City of Toronto budget

January 10, 2018



1 - Aligning all implicated city departments' priorities to a city-wide goal of creating and sustaining enough deeply affordable housing across Toronto – including city planning and licencing and standards. This could be done by coordinating a common set of strategic priorities through updated, integrated plans for SSHA and the Affordable Housing Office, with a mechanism to include the community as well.

2 - Using the provincial interest and commitment to *Homes For Good* funding to maximize its impact in Toronto. This will require contributing layering or stacking municipal dollars to fully optimize the opportunity that *Homes For Good* resources present. And a collective effort to secure and coordinate resources to provide the full continuum of support options that people may need to successfully secure and maintain housing (e.g., the range lower to higher intensity support arrangements). We need City of Toronto leadership to coordinate with the health sector, Local Health Integrations Networks (LHINs) and other orders of government.

3 - Committing a substantial portion of new National Housing Strategy funds to develop deeply affordable housing specifically for the chronic and episodic homeless population. The National Housing Strategy will bring useful new resources to Toronto and we urge City Council to be ready with articulated priorities and a plan to direct them to ending homelessness.

4 - Incentivize and reduce barriers to the creation of deeply affordable housing projects targeted at people experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness. This must include making it easier for both non-profit and private developers to create new affordable rental and supportive housing units in Toronto (e.g., reducing red tape with planning department, relaxing zoning restrictions, aligning the Open Door initiative to this strategic priority).

5 - Commit to the need for a much better data system that will allow for faster matching of people to appropriate shelter beds, and supports to move to housing. This is important and part of the solution that the City has not yet invested in. We believe that the challenges experienced over the last six weeks on making sure that all available shelter beds are being used on any given night makes this very clear. Investing here will mean we can finally properly understand our problem, its context and to be able to evaluate in real time what works or does not in our efforts.

Conclusion

We can end homelessness in Toronto. We can, and must, also provide dignified and health promoting services to people experiencing homelessness right now. By balancing our approaches, and use of City resources – available funding and others – we can design solutions to current emergency shelter crises that also create immediate housing or lay the groundwork for future housing. This is the opportunity City Council has before it right now, and we will continue to work with you to maximize it in the months and years to come.