

Deputation on EC7.10; Report for Action on the Implementation of Coroner's Recommendations from the Faulkner and Chapman Inquests to the Economic and Community Development Committee

September 5, 2019 by Amber Kellen of The John Howard Society of Toronto

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the Implementation of the Coroner's Recommendations from the Faulkner and Chapman Inquests.

My name is Amber Kellen and I am one of the Director's at the John Howard Society of Toronto. I have worked at the agency for over 22 years having held both frontline and management positions. Today I am the Director of Community Initiatives, Policy and Research. For those of you who are not familiar with the John Howard Society of Toronto, we are a non-profit, United Way Anchor organization. Over 100 staff work daily to fulfill our mission of helping make communities safer by delivering individualized and integrated support, empowering those in conflict with the law to achieve positive change. Last year, our organization reached 11,317 clients (both in and out of custody), 1,364 of whom were homeless. In addition, we distributed 2,226 harm reduction kits to people who use drugs.

I want to first begin by thanking the City of Toronto for this Report for Action and to point out that this last winter, our agency had full Standing in the Inquest into the death of Bradley Chapman. In the interest of time I will be speaking to only 4 recommendations; three from the Chapman Inquest and one from Faulkner's, respectively. In order to contextualize my remarks I first want to share some important information with you.

Studies shows that those who are released from custody have higher rates of mortality, more chronic health, mental health and substance use issues than the general population. Former prisoners are also more likely to suffer from brain injuries, cognitive impairments, trauma, social isolation and poverty. They are disproportionately represented throughout the homeless population and face

high risks of accidental death caused by drug overdose, especially following their discharge from custody. In fact, 1 in 10 opioid overdoses occurred in former prisoners within one year from their release from jail. For over a decade, our agency has spent time, energy and resources exploring and verifying the nexus between homelessness, substance use, and incarceration as have medical professionals and academics alike.

Between 2009 and 2010, as part of a research study, our agency surveyed 363 inmates in three provincial facilities in Toronto shortly before they were to be released. More than 1/3 (33%) of respondents expected to be homeless upon release (living on the streets, sleeping at a shelter, or couch-surfing) and another 12% had no idea where they would live once discharged. We hope to replicate this study in order to grasp the current magnitude of the problem today.

Further, Toronto and specifically South Etobicoke is home to Canada's largest jail; The Toronto South Detention Centre which at capacity houses 1630 men. Over 95% of people at that jail and over 65% of all inmates across the province are on remand. This means that they have been charged but not convicted of a crime, and are awaiting trial. With no definitive release date, discharge planning is almost impossible. Many people are released from custody while attending court without the bare essentials, including medications. Even those who are sentenced are in custody for relatively short periods of time. In fact, the average sentence in Ontario is 32 days. This is often just enough time to lose custody of a child, be terminated from a job, and to lose ones housing. Since 2006, the John Howard Society of Toronto has advocated for the City to seek options that will assist our clients in maintaining housing. Therefore, we support Actions related to recommendation 21 from the Chapman Inquest and any and all efforts that SSHA will be making via their submission in the, *"... 2020 budget process to enhance funding for the Eviction Prevention in the Community (EPIC) Program (and if approved), to explore how it can increase support for people at risk of losing their housing while incarcerated"*.

In order to respond to the needs of people who are homeless and who have been in conflict with the law, we must be able to understand their housing and support

needs to develop and implement programs that are effective. Therefore, we are in full support of initiatives by the City to better utilize the tools that they have to collect data from this population, thereby increasing the effectiveness of its Street Needs Assessment to inform policy and program responses. Specifically, we support the Action item that responds to recommendation 22 from the Chapman Inquest, namely that: *“...SSHA will work with health and correctional sector partners to explore further how specific survey methods and questions can help to better understand the housing needs of people in correctional facilities (and hospitals) through the next SNA in 2020”*.

Currently there are no men’s shelters anywhere in South Etobicoke and only one Out of the Cold program that has the capacity for 25 people when it is open. Each month at our Reintegration Services Trailer, our staff and peer support workers see approximately 100 people. Most of them are desperately seeking a safe place to stay upon release. They have had little choice but to refer them to shelters or respite sites located primarily in the downtown core or to the City’s Streets to Homes Assessment and Referral Centre which is about a 90 minute ride on public transit. Therefore, the John Howard Society fully supports the proposed Action related to recommendation number 23 of the Chapman Inquest which specifically states that: *“...as part of the City’s Shelter Expansion Initiative, (SSHA is exploring the viability of new shelter sites across the City) and actively looking for potential shelter sites in South Etobicoke where the Toronto South Detention Centre is located”*.

Transitional housing that includes case management has been proven to provide stability and connect people to essential services. Currently, the supportive housing that exists is beyond capacity and there are no specialized transitional housing spaces for people leaving institutions with substance issues and homeless. A March 2018 analysis of the Toronto Mental Health and Addictions Access Point waiting list conducted by the Wellesley Institute showed that in a recent two-year period, over 4,000 new people applied while less than 600 were placed in supportive housing. More than one-quarter of all applicants reported criminal justice system involvement. On average, this group waits two years

longer on the wait list to be placed in housing than the rest of Supportive Housing applicants.

The John Howard Society of Toronto has long advocated for the opportunity to develop and manage specialized transitional housing. Since the mid 90's when the Provincial Halfway House system was abolished, there has been no new and safe alternative. Arguably, the absence of this resource has hindered evidence-based practices that support gradual release and has done little to disrupt the jail-street-jail cycle. John Howard Society of Toronto is eager to work with partners, both public and private to make safe housing immediately available to assist individuals leaving custody. Capital needs aside, one of the most significant barriers to making this housing a reality stem from issues related to exclusionary zoning by-laws and practices. To this end, the John Howard Society is pleased to support the Actions set out with respect recommendation 35 from the Faulkner Inquest and feel hopeful about City's identification of *"...opportunities for expanding zoning permission for multi-tenant houses, improving multi-tenant house licensing requirements and program administration..."* We also look forward to the, *"...follow up report on Inclusionary Zoning Official Plan Policy Directions (that) will be presented to council (later this) fall"*.

In closing, The John Howard Society of Toronto recognizes that the function of Ontario's correctional facilities is beyond the mandate of the City of Toronto. However, the fact remains that both before and after incarceration a significant number of people who are homeless are heavily reliant on not only emergency services, but also on programs and services provided by the City in order to survive. It is our hope that going forward and as these Actions are implemented, we will see more housing, fewer deaths and additional opportunities for people who have been in conflict with the law to establish themselves back into our neighbourhoods. We will also make ourselves available to assist with the provision of information that may ease the processes required for implementing the Actions set out in this Report.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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