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December 7, 2020

Economic and Community Development Committee Members

RE: Item 18.3: Supporting People with Disabilities in Toronto During and Beyond COVID-19 - Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Programs

Good morning councillors.

I am faculty in the Critical Disability Studies Department at York University and author of *Disability Politics and Theory* as well as a number of other scholarly articles and chapters about disability and accessibility.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

Toronto's housing crisis is felt much more acutely for disabled people because there are so few accessible units in social housing and the private market.

I want to speak specifically to the shelter accessibility issues raised in the report. This report must be read in conjunction with the report for item 18.6 which acknowledges that an average of 38 people a day are turned away by Central Intake due to lack of availability of beds. This doesn't count the many people with disabilities who do not attempt to access shelter beds because they know that their basic needs won't be met – many know they can't get in the door.

I was alarmed to see in the presentation for this item that only 7 of 24 COVID-19 sites had a "good" accessibility rating. As this rating seems to only be used to determine the "appropriate level of accessibility support" it means that many of these sites are unavailable to people with disabilities. These are sites that SSHA selected this year. This is unacceptable.

Further, making 20 percent of new shelter spaces accessible is far too low. Homeless people are disproportionately disabled and there is a significant pre-existing gap to fill in accessible spaces.

You need to dramatically increase the percent of new accessible shelter spaces.

You also need to deal with the realities of the COVID-19 crisis. Congregate settings pose an exceptional risk for many homeless people – especially those with pre-existing medical conditions. There is a massive crisis on our streets, in our parks, in our ravines and you cannot police

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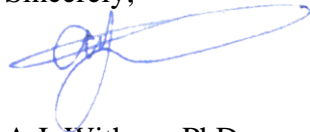
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your way out of it.

Many people with disabilities are currently encamped on public space across this city. They need support and supplies not harassment and tickets. They need a moratorium on evictions immediately. And, in the next 3 years, we need 10,000 units of rent geared to income housing – 1/3 of which should be accessible units.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

A.J. Withers, PhD  
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