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To: Community Services Committee

From: Jane Pitfield
Co-Chair, Advisory Committee on Homeless & Socially Isolated Persons

Subject: TB or not TB? Report of a Public Inquiry into the State of Tuberculosis within Toronto's Homeless Population

At its July 11th, 2003 meeting, the Advisory Committee on Homeless & Socially Isolated Persons heard a presentation from the TB Action Group on its June 2003 report entitled "TB or not TB? Report of a Public Inquiry into the State of Tuberculosis within Toronto's Homeless Population" (as attached).

The Advisory Committee endorsed the recommendations of the TB Action Group report and asks the Community Services Committee to adopt the income, housing and shelter related recommendations as listed below. The health related recommendations have been referred to the September meeting of the Board of Health for consideration.

It is recommended that:

- 1) Community Services Committee adopt recommendations 1, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 of the TB Action Group report, specifically that:
 - a) all levels of government should immediately implement the One Percent Solution, a social housing strategy that calls on all levels of government to double their spending on a comprehensive new social housing strategy. This would provide decent affordable housing with a range of options and supports including supportive and flexible housing for people with a range of health issues;
 - b) the City of Toronto must create a fast track process to the Rent Supplement Program to rapidly house homeless people with active TB, and also those homeless people with any serious health issue that increases their risk from TB infection including Hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, and cancer;
 - c) the Shelter, Housing and Support Division must develop a fast-track process to implement its revised Shelter Standards in all Toronto shelters. In particular, those standards that ensure adequate space, nutritious food, proper air ventilation and fair barring practices must be addressed. This must include the provision of adequate funding to shelter operators to help them meet the new standards;

- d) the Shelter, Housing and Support Division must open more shelter facilities to reduce dangerous overcrowding. Shelter occupancy rates in each shelter must not exceed the City's own recommendation of 90% occupancy;
 - e) the Shelter, Housing and Support Division must eliminate all forced movement of homeless people between shelters, and to this end must develop a comprehensive shelter strategy to eliminate reliance on volunteer-based seasonal shelter programs (The Out of the Cold Program);
 - f) the Shelter, Housing and Support Division must recognize the risks associated with overcrowded drop in centers (day shelters) and immediately develop a plan to adequately and stably fund such programs with core funding; and
 - g) the Shelter, Housing and Support Division must create shelters with policies and structures in place to accommodate people with serious addiction issues. At least 20 percent of shelter beds need to be dedicated to harm reduction to begin to meet the needs of the conservatively estimated number of shelter users with addictions and mental health issues;
- 2) Community Services Committee adopt recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 28 of the TB Action Group report related to the federal or provincial governments with a request that Toronto Council forward these recommendations to the appropriate ministry, specifically that:
- a) all levels of government should immediately implement the One Percent Solution, a social housing strategy that calls on all levels of government to double their spending on a comprehensive new social housing strategy. This would provide decent affordable housing with a range of options and supports including supportive and flexible housing for people with a range of health issues;
 - b) the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing must immediately increase the allocation of Rent Supplement units to the City of Toronto for both private and not-for-profit housing providers so that an emergency re-housing program can begin to reduce overcrowding in shelters;
 - c) the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services must ensure that the process by which individuals with active TB are fast tracked to the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) continues to be made available;
 - d) the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services must increase social assistance rates (Ontario Works and ODSP) to livable levels. Social assistance rates must be indexed to the cost of living. The housing portion of funds needs to be enough so that people can live in healthy circumstances;
 - e) the provincial government must increase the minimum wage to \$10 per hour. On a lesser wage people cannot afford to live in safe housing nor eat healthy foods; and
 - f) the provincial and federal governments must reinstate funding to Welcome Homes to help new refugees and immigrants settle into Canada in order to minimize their settlement trauma.

Background:

The report “TB or not TB? Report of a Public Inquiry into the State of Tuberculosis within Toronto’s Homeless Population” documents the results of a day-long session of testimony before a panel of experts. People testifying at the session included people with expertise in homelessness, emergency shelter, health and mental health care, immigration and refugee issues, harm reduction, HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, and the jail system. An inquiry panel of five people heard the testimony. The panel was comprised of a mental health outreach worker, a formerly homeless person, a family physician, an academic, and a former Toronto City Councillor.

The need for an inquiry arose from the concerns of front-line health workers about the rate of TB infection among people who are homeless. This includes people staying in shelters as noted in the June 2001 micro epidemic of TB in two shelters (Seaton House and Maxwell Meighan) in which 15 men developed active TB. Three of these men eventually died. The provincial Office of the Coroner has promised to conduct an inquiry into one of these three deaths although a date has yet to be scheduled.

Toronto Public Health did work with shelter staff to contain the shelter micro epidemic. However, homeless health workers remain concerned about conditions, such as poor nutrition, lack of housing and adequate incomes, lack of access to health care services and overcrowded shelters, which continue to place homeless people at increased risk of developing TB.

In response to issues identified at the inquiry, the Inquiry Panel made 28 recommendations related to housing, income, shelter conditions, health, jail conditions and immigrants and refugees.

Sincerely,

Councillor Jane Pitfield