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**CLASP Budget Committee Meeting 19 Submissions (December 7, 2011)**

*Written Submissions for distribution to the budget committee*

BU19.1 2012 Capital and Operating Budgets – Public Consultation

We are writing on behalf of the Community and Legal Aid Services Program (CLASP).

CLASP is a poverty law legal clinic at Osgoode Hall Law School. We are writing to provide insight, from a legal clinic perspective, on the 2012 Municipal Budget. We at CLASP are troubled by the potential cuts to several services that we see as essential for the most vulnerable residents of this city. If these cuts are implemented, we anticipate a substantial increase in demand for legal services among people living in poverty. As the legal aid system is already operating at capacity, more and more people living in poverty would be unable to access the legal services they desperately need, leading to increased inequality throughout our city. Our particular concerns are housing and childcare, but we feel that changes to these two essential services will have broader impacts on other city departments.

Beyond legal entitlement, adequate affordable housing is a basic human need essential to healthy communities. A lack of adequate shelter has been linked to an increase in crime and has a negative impact on health (Ontario election 2011, the Ontario Mental Health and Addictions Alliance). As you are aware, increased crime and decreased quality of life leads to significant spending in other areas of the city's budget.

We recognize that the city needs capital in order to maintain its existing TCHC housing stock. Many of our clients live in TCHC buildings, and come to us because their units are in states of disrepair. The City's failure to properly fund TCHC puts it in breach of the Residential Tenancies Act, which obligates the City to maintain its units. However, selling off existing TCHC rental stock is not the best option to remedy the situation, nor is it a long-term solution. There are alternative ways to raise the capital required without impacting existing TCHC users. One solution could be adding a dedicated TCHC fee to the development costs charges levied on new developments in the city. This would recognize that the city has an obligation to accommodate all of its residents, not just those living in downtown condos.

Additionally, decreasing the existing stock of dedicated TCHC housing only exacerbates the pressure the TCHC is facing. According to Housing Connections, there is a waiting list of 130,000+ people looking to get into a TCHC unit. Decreasing the existing stock of housing not only increases the number of people on this list, but also leaves applicants with few alternatives but living on the street. This in turn lowers the desirability of the city for other investors.

Although the city is facing capital pressures to maintain existing units, and has voted to sell off 22 existing rentals, there may be other possibilities to build new stock in order to at least maintain the stock of TCHC housing available. One consideration is to adopt policies introduced in other cities with similar issues, like the City of Vancouver. They have

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successfully approved new projects in their downtown core where private developers integrated new social housing into their developments and still maintained high sales prices and short sales periods. Not only does this option promote diversity in Toronto's communities, but it clearly will have little impact on the demand for private housing in downtown Toronto.

Finally, privatization of the ongoing management of low-income housing is not a feasible option. The private market is not in a position to absorb the needs of such a high volume of low income tenants. Subsidies to private landlords don't always translate over to tenants. There is no incentive for a private owner to repair a derelict unit if there are 130,000 others willing to take it from the current, complaining tenant. The increasing repair costs associated with aging buildings and the resulting increase in costly litigation at the Landlord and Tenant Board can only be avoided with a plan to repair and expand city-subsidized housing.

Poverty law issues are rarely discrete; they are intimately related. In addition to housing, affordable childcare is a contributing factor towards our clients' legal problems. We appreciate the fact that Mayor Ford has committed to not closing existing subsidized childcare centres, and that City Council has saved 2000 subsidized childcare spaces.<sup>7</sup> However, we continue to have concerns about the impact of budget cuts in this area to the quality and delivery of city-funded childcare services. People living in poverty with children require subsidized childcare spaces in order to search for a job and to eventually become independent from other city-funded social services. The pressure of this increased expense, combined with this loss of earnings, can lead people to meet their needs through crime. We are tired of seeing parents charged with theft because they are stealing milk and diapers for their babies.

The problems from insufficient childcare are long-term. Unfortunately, these problems impact the children as well. If a parent cannot afford daycare, they may be forced to use a neighbour or home daycare lacking qualifications under the daycare guidelines. This can potentially harm children educationally, socially and even nutritionally.

The importance of child care and early child development is well-known. However, in Toronto, access to child care is currently worse in neighbourhoods with the highest child poverty. "If budget cuts make access to child care less accessible, especially to low income families who cannot afford private care, this will have a negative and inequitable impact on the health of already disadvantaged groups." (Wellesley Institute <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/publication-papers/the-real-cost-of-city-cuts/>) The issue is compounded by the fact that other grants for youth programming in the City are at risk of being cut. By doing so, council is condemning our youth to a bleak future within the City.

Our clinic and others like it are already overworked and we deal daily with the way these issues spill over into all facets of people's lives. We appeal to the city to not increase the difficulties our clients and other people living in poverty already face.