



mfateh

multifaith alliance to end homelessness

PW9.10.3

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10 Trinity Square, Toronto, Ontario M5G 1B1 · T: 416-795-5402 · www.mfateh.ca · E: coordination@mfateh.ca

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## Dear Councillor

Members of the MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness are concerned about the implications of an amendment to Chapter 743, Use of Streets and Sidewalks, of the Municipal Code. (Item PW9.10) This amendment would prevent people from camping, dwelling or lodging on streets “subject to application of the Interdepartmental Protocol for Homeless People Camping in Public Spaces”.

MFATEH is a non-profit organization made up of members of diverse faith communities and organizations in the Toronto area who speak to governments about the needs of homeless people and those dealing with unaffordable, over-crowded and substandard housing. Respect and compassion for all our neighbours and their inclusion in our society are core values that we hold in common.

Many of us have had personal contact with homeless people in Out of the Cold programs and know that they lead extremely vulnerable lives, cut off from the benefits of mainstream society. Especially people homeless for long periods suffer from mental illness (only made worse by living on the streets), physical disabilities, substance abuse and the effects of past abuse. Many feel isolated, lack trust in others and in their ability to cope in the shelter system.

Were this amendment to be used to forcibly remove homeless people from the streets, it would only increase the harm that they face, causing further mental stress and fears for their safety. It would amount to punishing those who are already among the most vulnerable in our city.

As our name implies we want to see an end to street homelessness. Outreach workers in the Streets to Homes program have made considerable progress toward this goal, working to assist people in moving to shelters or rental housing. This approach depends on the patient building of relationships of trust. The use of coercion would be counter-productive causing people to further withdraw and resist help. We believe that the “housing first” approach of Streets to Homes is the right one and agree with the Core Service Review report earlier this year that this program should be expanded.

There are already measures to deal with dangerous behavior of a homeless person (or of anyone) on public streets. Medical authorities have the power to detain someone who is an immediate danger to themselves or others. Other laws allow intervention to deal with threatening behavior or obstruction of streets and sidewalks.

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Courts have ruled against similar anti-camping measures in other jurisdictions. To include this provision in the Municipal Code could open the city to costly legal challenges.

Whether the anti-camping amendment can be applied to homeless people would seem to depend on what the Interdepartmental Protocol says as well as its legal status in relation to the Municipal Code. Clarification is needed before Council approves this amendment. We strongly urge you to ensure that it will not be used against very vulnerable city residents.

Sincerely  
Margaret Vandembroucke  
Chair, Advocacy Committee  
MFATEH