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- Full-Time
- Long-Term Care Homes
& Services Part-Time
- Recreation Workers
Part-Time
- Unit B Part-Time

*Toronto Community
Housing Corporation*

**SERVING OUR
MEMBERS
SINCE
1942**

May 23, 2013

Jaye Robinson, Chair and
Members of the Community Development and Recreation Committee
10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Councillor Robinson and Members of the Community Development and Recreation Committee:

**RE: CD21.4 - Response to the Service Efficiency Study Recommendations
for Hostel Services**

The Shelter, Support, & Housing Administration Division is responsible for the care and safety of over 4,000 homeless men, women, families and youth every day and every night of the year. The services are provided as a team to ensure nutritious food, a safe, clean bed, a shower and a known and supportive face.

The staff report before you today states:

“The Emergency Shelter system in Toronto serves equity-seeking groups such as seniors, people with disabilities, individuals with mental health issues, the working poor, and other vulnerable groups. Effective operation of the shelter system is important in ensuring that temporary accommodation is available to a variety of equity seeking-groups.”

Integration and a Continuum of Care

Caring and stabilizing the lives of the city's homeless population is a distinct and imperative critical service we provide to some of our most vulnerable people. The last thing these men, women and children need is further and unnecessary disruption in their lives. The integration and continuum of care in the City's shelters is a foundation for the homeless to rebuild their lives.

Our shelter system delivers high quality services to those who need it most.

Homeless and marginally-housed individuals that use the City of Toronto's shelter system require an integrated system of care that respects their unique needs.

Cleaning and food services at City-run shelters are critical parts of the larger whole.

The population served by Toronto's City-run shelters are some of the most vulnerable, facing many challenges. Women fleeing domestic abuse with their children, Aboriginals, members of the LGBTQ community, people struggling with abuse and mental health issues, in addition to the physical toll caused by homelessness. For these users, there is an even greater than normal need to create an environment that is safe and familiar. The people who provide cleaning and food services are familiar faces that contribute to a sense of well-being, safety and community.

Quality of Services

In many instances, contracting-out leads to a lowering of standards, as contractors seek to maximize their own profits by looking for 'efficiencies' within operations. In a shelter environment this is highly problematic.

In terms of cleaning, special attention must be paid, particularly in sleeping, washing and common facilities. In addition to general cleanliness and hygiene, cleaning staff in City-run shelters must also be mindful of increased risk of acquired infections, such as hepatitis and tuberculosis. Bed bugs are another major issue.

Dealing with these issues requires experience and an intimate knowledge of the shelter system, its challenges and the needs of the people who use the system.

With respect to food services, shelter residents' dietary needs are, to put it simply, unique. In some instances, shelters provide residents with their only nutritious meals. Residents often have specific health challenges (diabetes, hepatitis, poor dental health, etc.), which require easily-digestible food containing a high nutritional and caloric value. Preparing meals in-house, under the direction of trained food handlers (and ideally a dietitian), ensures that residents' dietary needs are met.

Impact on Public Health

The public health risks associated with homelessness, precariously-housed and marginally-housed populations are well-established. The system is in high demand, leading to overcrowding, which creates a high risk for acquired infections such as tuberculosis, hepatitis A and respiratory infections. While it is impossible to eradicate the public health risk associated with homelessness, the key first line of defense is a vigilant shelter system that takes all universal precautions to ensure communicable illnesses are kept contained.

Additionally, parasitic infections, such as lice and bed bugs, are ongoing challenges faced by shelter staff. Left unchecked, these infestations would not only take root within shelters, but move outside the system into rooming houses and other rental stock, including public housing, which already struggles to prevent such outbreaks.

The best way to maintain an effective line of defence against infectious outbreaks is a well-trained, experienced staff that have first-hand knowledge of the shelter. Contracting-out will eliminate this effective line of defence.

Fort York Residence

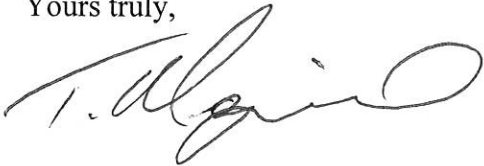
Seeking to contract-out shelter services at Fort York Residence is baffling. Fort York Residence is an award-winning shelter, a role model of best practices for the shelter system. In 2006, Fort York Residence received the Best Practices in Affordable Housing Award from Canada Mortgage and Housing in recognition of the creative and successful programs offered that enable homeless men to transition to work and permanent housing in the community.

Our final response to this agenda item to contract-out Shelter Services is to quote the Service Efficiency Study itself:

“SSHA management expressed concerns about a decrease in the quality of services, because outsourced food and facilities service providers would not be part of the team and their staff would not care about the clients in the same way City staff would. Management was also concerned that food and facilities service providers would not understand the complexity and true costs of the services provided by the City.”

I would like to thank the Community Development and Recreation Committee for their time and understanding of this issue.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Maguire', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Tim Maguire
President