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**Executive Committee**

Deputation by Leila Sarangi, Women's Habitat

October 20, 2015

**Re: Poverty Reduction Strategy**

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about the need we see in our community for this poverty reduction strategy. I am here on behalf of Women's Habitat of Etobicoke, which is an agency that provides emergency shelter and support services for women and children fleeing gender based violence and who are dealing with complex issues of trauma and poverty.

We have organized multiple women-only conversations in the 3 phases of community engagement in the development of this strategy in different parts of the City and we did this in partnership with a number of other women's shelters and community based organizations. We've spoken to over 500 women, most of who live on low or no incomes.

No matter who we spoke to or where they lived, the top three issues we consistently heard was the need for more affordable, safe, quality housing; good jobs; and local, affordable childcare that accommodates precarious, shift, and unstable work hours as well as unstable parental demand. What is key to these themes for women is that they are inter-related and cannot be addressed in silos. We have worked with many women in our agency who have been forced to turn down offers of decent jobs because the type of childcare they need - to match evening, overnight or weekend work hours, or that is within commuting distance - just doesn't exist. We know that precarious and unstable housing situations causes much stress and compounds other issues women are dealing.

We applaud the Poverty Reduction Strategy's recommendation which begin to address some of these needs and issues as well as many more. We support recommendations that seek to increase housing stock and the quality of housing. But not just any type of housing. We have heard through our community consultations, and also know from the decades of providing housing services, that larger units are in high demand for families especially mothers with multiple children. We expect that this demand will increase now that children of the same gender are not required to share the same bedroom.

We support recommendations that increase childcare subsidies, and access for people with barriers to those subsidies. We are dismayed that the incubation of flexible childcare models has been delayed until 2017-2018, because we are confident about the type of positive and immediate impact such services would have for low-income women, but are encouraged that the recommendation is linked to the development of quality jobs.

We support that the City become a living wage employer and to encourage other employers to do the same. This will begin to address some of the root causes of women's poverty, including the gendered and racialized wage gap. We have heard from women about the importance of developing paid internships and in some cases offering wraparound supports so that they can take advantage of these quality jobs.



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Women's Habitat and the women we have spoken with believe this is a good start to reducing poverty in Toronto. We know there is a long way to go still and anticipate meaningful municipal investments in the 2016 budget to begin to make this happen.

The City has been working in partnership with residents, community organizations, and other sectors to develop this strategy and we encourage the City to continue building these partnerships in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation through the proposed Accountability Table.

And Women's Habitat looks forward to a continued role in the process. Thank you



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