



140 ISLINGTON AVENUE
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www.womens-habitat.ca

January 10, 2017

Re: Submission for the 2017 Budget Consultation

To the Budget Committee, City of Toronto:

Statistics show that one in four Torontonians are poor. And to a great extent, when we talk about poverty in Toronto, we are talking about women's poverty. There is a persistent wage and income gap between women and men, with women in Toronto earning, on average, .68 cents to the male dollar. This gap widens if she is Indigenous or Racialized.

Women are generally the poorest members of households, the poorest people in a neighbourhood, and the poorest citizens of a city. The recent confirmation that Toronto has the highest child poverty rate in Canada is really an indicator of our city's rate of poverty among mothers.

Women across the city have told us clearly that the issues that need to be resolved to alleviate poverty are housing, jobs and childcare, in addition to other services including transit and recreation.

We heard the City promise to implement the recommendations in these areas of their poverty reduction strategy when they unanimously adopted it in November 2015.

So we were shocked and concerned when the City put forward a 2017 budget plan that considers a 2.6% cut across all divisions, with no new investments in poverty reduction initiatives and that pushes the implementation of a suite of vetted progressive revenue tools further down the road.

This budget plan will not be putting women or Torontonians on the path to prosperity.

Housing is a critical issue that we deal with on a daily basis. The lack of affordable and safe housing is the number one reason why women cannot leave abusive relationships, it is why there are 175,000



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people on the social housing waitlist, it is why our shelter system is backlogged. Without new investments, people will continue to struggle with precarious housing, homelessness, hunger. And this backlog will mean our women's shelter will continue to turn away 650 women and their children each year who are in need of emergency shelter.

People living on low-incomes will continue to struggle with rising transit fares, women will struggle with long wait times that make it difficult to drop children off to childcare and get to work on time and we have seen women lose jobs because of this. Other women will still be unable go to work because they're stuck on long waitlists for affordable, local childcare, their fees are rising, and because flexible childcare for those work outside of the traditional 9-5 hours just doesn't exist.

We can look to examples outside of Toronto where investments into childcare directly led to broad economic returns in Quebec where their provincial strategy helped women get back to work, and have resulted in nearly equal workforce participation in Sweden's proportional system.

Toronto's 2017 budget plan will not make this kind of difference. Instead, it will put low-income women and Torontonians further behind. Higher user fees and service cuts means the poorest in our communities will pay more and access less, we still won't be addressing the City's revenue problem, and the fairness gap between those who can afford to live in this city and those who face barriers to prosperity will continue to widen and polarize.

The Budget Committee does have an opportunity to address these disparities - in July, City Council agreed that the 2017 budget decisions should be made through a Gender Equity Lens.

Gender equity acknowledges and analyses the underlying root causes of disparities that different groups of women face based on their social, cultural and economic identities and seeks to redress these through allocation of public resources. This is particularly important now, as inequality and segregation between individuals and neighbourhoods are increasing in our city.



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In practice, a gender equity lens does the following:

- It recognizes that revenues and expenditures of City budgets (and by extension, the services and infrastructure they allow) affect women in particular ways, which are compounded when gender intersects with other identities that can include, Aboriginal status, race, culture, creed, language, citizenship, amount and source of income, dis/ability, sexual identity and age, as well as geographic location in the City;
- Seeks to redress and remedy these disparities through fair taxation and allocations of public resources;
- Makes a strong commitment to collecting and publishing gender-disaggregated data, relies on this data to inform policy and budgetary decisions, and further, works in partnership with diverse women to understand impacts of these decisions in their lives.

Women's Habitat strongly recommends the following:

- That a Gender Equity Lens be embedded in both the 2017 budget as well as into the Long-Term Financial Direction of the City, since the goal of achieving equity and a truly prosperous city for all is an ongoing process that cannot be resolved in one budget;
- That new investments be made into affordable and social housing and that our sister shelters operate at the same capacity as their men's shelter counterparts, that is at the recommended 90%, not the 99% forecasted in this budget that will have detrimental impacts on homeless women;
- That the City fund their 5 year plan to create 2000 new childcare spaces starting with this 2017 budget and that it is imperative that new subsidized spaces are attached to them; and



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- Fully fund all areas of the outstanding 2016 Poverty Reduction Action Items as well as all 2017 Poverty Reduction Action Items according to the work plan adopted by Council.

Women's Habitat looks forward to continually working with the City to achieve our mutual goals of equity and prosperity for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Leila Sarangi", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Leila Sarangi
Community Programs Manager
Women's Habitat of Etobicoke