

June 29, 2017

Marilyn Toft, Manager
Office of the City Clerk
City of Toronto
100 Queen St. W., 13th fl. W.
Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2

VIA EMAIL: clerk@toronto.ca

Subject: MM31.15: Exempting the North York Women's Shelter from Planning Application Fees

Dear Ms. Toft:

We are writing, through you, to Toronto City Council with respect to Notice of Motion MM31.15, being considered by Council on July 4.

The employees of North York Women's Shelter (NYWS) support the application by the shelter to waive Planning and Development Application Fees for the shelter's plan to build a larger shelter. We appreciate the contribution to violence-against-women services that this would represent. However, we also want Council to know what is happening at the shelter right now.

The shelter is closed. On May 19, 2017, NYWS closed its doors and laid off 32 women who worked as residential counsellors for women and children facing violence.

NYWS was the only shelter serving women and children in North York. The 30 shelter beds at NYWS have been moved to nine shelters across Toronto, but none of the counsellors' jobs moved with those beds. At a time when women and children continue to be turned away from shelters, 32 experienced counsellors have been removed from the system.

Staff are the heart of any public service, and violence-against-women programs are no exception. The \$8.3 million investment to build a larger shelter is welcome, but it means that women in North York who need violence-against-women services will not be able to get them for two years.

In 2013, Ontario's Auditor General reported that 56 per cent of women who sought help from an emergency shelter in Ontario were turned away in the 2011/12 fiscal year. In 2016, *Shelter Voices*, the third national survey of shelters and transition houses for women and their children, found that shelters turned away 73 per cent of those seeking help across Canada.

This is not acceptable. It's a sad fact, but every community in this country needs violence-against-women services. And North York, with a population of over 670,000, is no exception.

NYWS is asking Council to waive certain fees specifically because it is a women's shelter. Yet for the past six weeks, the existing building has sat empty and the women of North York have gone without violence-against-women services. We respectfully request that, prior to making a decision on MM31.15, Council call on NYWS to explain what it plans to do to get 32 counsellors back to work immediately.

The lapse in service for women and children facing violence is keeping women and children in violent situations. Whatever Council can do to help is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. For more information, please contact Amy Clements, chair of the Community Services sector of OPSEU, at 289-387-4680 or lulu.sparkle@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Staff counsellors at the North York Women's Shelter
Members of Local 518, Ontario Public Service Employees Union