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To: **Budget Committee, Toronto City Council**

DATE: **Wednesday, January 10, 2018**

RE: **Investing in housing to end homelessness**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH).

The TAEH is a collective impact initiative committed to ending homelessness in Toronto. Our vision is zero chronic and episodic homelessness in Toronto. One way of defining this is that we will come to a place where the number of people becoming homeless every month will be equal to, or less than, the number of people experiencing homelessness securing good, sustainable housing again.

The state and scope of homelessness in Toronto right now is a real and true crisis. It is a health crisis and also a housing crisis. It's cost in human lives, potential and suffering is not an acceptable situation for any just or compassionate society. We know that many of you on this committee, your fellow Councillors, the Mayor and many voices in the community agree.

The TAEH believes that housing solutions must be part of responses to homelessness. This is why we supported Council's plan in early December to include a strategy to move people from shelter to housing as part of its overall response at that time. We are doing our part by launching and coordinating a Rapid Housing Project. This project will assist as many people as possible – those currently in shelters - to find long-term housing and the supports they may need to maintain successful tenancy.

We also continue to support City Council, Mayor Tory and the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) in the actions taken since late December to increase the number of available shelter beds and respite spaces, including using the Moss Park Armouries as a seventh respite site.

Yes, immediate emergency action was and is needed this winter. The current challenges people face in finding good shelter, appropriate health care and other supports demands it. People experiencing homelessness, front-line workers, service agencies and volunteers know this very well, and we support their messages about current conditions and lack of appropriate resources to meet people's needs.

As we have stated before, however, we cannot address homelessness through an expansion of the shelter services alone. While it is true that shelters and the people working in them make a world of difference to the safety, health and well-being of people experiencing homelessness, shelters are not permanent, sustainable long-term solutions to homelessness.

Of course we should make conditions better and provide improved and coordinated supports to people in or seeking emergency shelter. We must make sure that time spent in the shelter system doesn't prolong or exacerbate a person's homelessness or worsen their health. We must also make wait times for good shelter beds as short as possible – and perhaps explore waiting time as another measure of the quality of our system.

But we can't stop there or only put our resources there. We have to at the same time invest in the things we know will end homelessness. And that is deeply affordable housing and supports. Housing that truly gives people a home and the support they need to thrive. Solutions that:

- Meet the choices, needs and contexts of each individual so as to better support long-term, successful tenancies.
- Is affordable for those at the lowest income levels – such as those in receipt of Ontario Works benefits or Ontario Disability Support Pensions. This is what we call “deeply affordable” housing – when costs do not exceed the amount of whatever benefits, pensions or housing allowances a person has to contribute to rent.
- Includes a range of intensity of supports from low to very high. Some of this housing must be in purpose-built settings and will take time and commitment to develop; others can be made more readily available in scattered rental units across buildings and neighbourhoods across Toronto.

Investing in housing solutions like these cannot wait. Not doing so will contribute to our city facing the same crisis and challenges next winter. There are things that City Council, with this budget as one of its key tools, can do right away to increase the role of housing in ending homelessness, and ensure we are ready for next winter and the next. This includes:

**1 - Aligning all implicated city departments' priorities to a city-wide goal of creating and sustaining enough deeply affordable housing across Toronto** – including city planning and licencing and standards. This could be done by coordinating a common set of strategic priorities through updated, integrated plans for SSHA and the Affordable Housing Office, with a mechanism to include the community as well.

**2 - Using the provincial interest and commitment to *Homes For Good* funding to maximize its impact in Toronto.** This will require contributing layering or stacking municipal dollars to fully optimize the opportunity that *Homes For Good* resources present. And a collective effort to secure and coordinate resources to provide the full continuum of support options that people may need to successfully secure and maintain housing (e.g., the range lower to higher intensity support arrangements). We need City of Toronto leadership to coordinate with the health sector, Local Health Integrations Networks (LHINs) and other orders of government.

**3 - Committing a substantial portion of new National Housing Strategy funds to develop deeply affordable housing specifically for the chronic and episodic homeless population.**

The National Housing Strategy will bring useful new resources to Toronto and we urge City Council to be ready with articulated priorities and a plan to direct them to ending homelessness.

**4 - Incentivize and reduce barriers to the creation of deeply affordable housing projects targeted at people experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness.** This must include making it easier for both non-profit and private developers to create new affordable rental and supportive housing units in Toronto (e.g., reducing red tape with planning department, relaxing zoning restrictions, aligning the Open Door initiative to this strategic priority).

**5 - Commit to the need for a much better data system** that will allow for faster matching of people to appropriate shelter beds, and supports to move to housing. This is important and part of the solution that the City has not yet invested in. We believe that the challenges experienced over the last six weeks on making sure that all available shelter beds are being used on any given night makes this very clear. Investing here will mean we can finally properly understand our problem, its context and to be able to evaluate in real time what works or does not in our efforts.

## **Conclusion**

We can end homelessness in Toronto. We can, and must, also provide dignified and health promoting services to people experiencing homelessness right now. By balancing our approaches, and use of City resources – available funding and others – we can design solutions to current emergency shelter crises that also create immediate housing or lay the groundwork for future housing. This is the opportunity City Council has before it right now, and we will continue to work with you to maximize it in the months and years to come.

### **For more information:**

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