

Michael Thompson, Chair  
Economic and Community  
Development Committee  
City of Toronto

September 4, 2019

Dear Councillor Thompson and committee members:

Re: EC7: 10 Implementation of Coroner's Recommendations from the Faulkner and Chapman Inquests

We are writing to you as a group of concerned nurses who work with people experiencing homelessness and people who use drugs in Toronto and the GTA. We see first-hand the implications of both the housing and overdose crisis and the need to take action now.

Each night, the shelter and respite usage is at capacity and many people are turned away with nowhere to go. Without access to truly affordable housing, we have an urgent need to open more shelter beds so the shelter capacity can remain at 90% or below, as per the City's criteria to prevent overcrowding in shelters and provide a bed for everyone in need. Given that the shelter system is full, we are asking that the 4<sup>th</sup> dome structure be opened as well as any other available space that can be used as shelter or respite sites, such as the ones that are opened during the winter season. Furthermore, these sites need to be harm-reduction friendly by welcoming people who use substances into these spaces. We also ask that the City declare a housing and homelessness emergency and advocate for more funding to go toward rent-g geared-to-income housing that is accessible for people experiencing homelessness.

Among people experiencing homelessness, Toronto Public Health reports drug toxicity as a leading cause of death. We need to increase harm reduction services for people who use drugs and alcohol, as well as advocate for the decriminalization of drugs and drug use. The stigma and discrimination associated with substance use leads to inaction of our government, resulting in the death of hundreds of people in Toronto each year. We need the City to declare the overdose epidemic a public health emergency. We need the City to advocate for more funding and resources for supervised consumption sites for people to use drugs, access to a safe supply of drugs, and more funding for detox and treatment centres that can meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Finally, we call on the City to include the leadership of front-line workers and people with lived experiences on strategies to stop preventable substance-related or homelessness-related deaths in Toronto. Their voices are paramount in informing decisions that directly affect their lives. Policies and programs need to be designed with lived experience at the tables.

Please act on the Coroner's Recommendations from the tragic deaths of Grant Faulkner and Bradley Chapman. We are in both a housing crisis and overdose crisis and the City needs to act to stop these emergencies from claiming any more lives.

Sincerely,

Roxie Danielson, RN and Rachel Birmingham, RN  
Street Nurses Network

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