

Good morning, members of the Community and Economic Development Committee.

My name is Alan Lennon. I am the chair of the Board of Management at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre in Leslieville, downtown Toronto and an active community member from Ward 14.

Today I am here to speak about the staff report on the Fair Pass Program and the changes to that program outlined in the report. On behalf of the Ralph Thornton Centre I urge you to keep your promise to fully fund this program in 2021 and to, if possible, expand it to other impoverished groups in our city. Do not take away this vital support from our low income citizens.

We also urge you to simplify the process of applying and activating the Presto cards for this program. You should continue to mail validated cards to those eligible rather than force them to travel (without a card) in order to pick up a card and then travel again in order to validate it. There is no reason to make such a change – they create barriers to those who need support. Our social policies should be to help people not to use programs to throw up barriers to their use.

The RTCC knows that these measures (the removal of these aspects of the program) will create increased need for other social service – greater poverty means more health care demand, more social service demand. Make life more difficult, not less difficult, is not what community and economic development should be about.

Consider those who have to live on disability and welfare. They have to travel to medical appointments and treatments on an almost weekly basis as well appointments in relation to their social welfare benefits. They obviously have to rely on either public transit or their own shoe leather. Rather than walk an hour each way so they can pay the rent or buy food, the Fair Pass Program means they can barely afford public transit but can use this public benefit. Given the weather in Toronto in the winter and in the summer, isn't better for them to get the card already validated in the mail than have to walk somewhere to get it. Isn't better not to have people with disabilities walk hours to their appointments? For those who are in like situations, this program, while it could be better, shouldn't be made worse for them to use.

In conclusion, we recommend that you fully fund the program for 2021 and beyond and you make it easier to access, not harder.