



Thursday December 3, 2020.

To: City of Toronto Economic and Community Development Committee

My name is Danielle Koyama. I am writing to you on behalf of Japanese Canadians for Social Justice, a group that aims to build community support for human rights and social justice. I am also a front line worker in the downtown east end of Toronto and I have to witness the devastation of the housing and homelessness crisis on a daily basis. JCSJ is joining in solidarity with all those currently suffering as a result of this city's housing crisis and with the nearly 10,000 Torontonians who face homelessness tonight. We publicly join all those calling for safe space, safe shelter and safe housing for all.

Our history as Japanese Canadians is one of mass displacement by systemic government forces. We were forced from our homes into homelessness and insecurity, warehoused on the exhibition grounds of Vancouver, and shipped to internment camps, so we understand what it means to be without a home. Our history as Japanese Canadians also includes the fight for redress as well as for human rights. These rights include the right to live, the right to basic shelter and the right to housing.

The shelters are full. On a regular basis I sit with people who are calling central intake to seek shelter and who are told to call back every hour to see if there might be a bed available. The referral centre is now closed, drop ins and respite centres are closed or have extremely limited capacity. People are forced to line up for food in the cold and the rain but then have nowhere warm to eat it. There is nowhere to go this winter to stay warm or look for shelter. Being told to call central intake is not any kind of humane alternative to safe, warm space.

At the same time, the City threatens to displace homeless people from encampments across the city in the name of "safety". "Safety" was used in the past to justify the displacement and internment of Japanese Canadians, and now is being used to justify the eviction of homeless people from tiny shelters and public space. This displacement is not in the interest of those the City claims it will be protecting. In both instances "safety" is used to mask state violence against marginalized people and to service the interests of those with privilege and power.

While the City's plan is to add an additional 560 shelter spaces, we know that the majority of these spaces (including the "Better Living Centre" on Toronto's exhibition grounds) are in congregate living areas with poor conditions and no privacy. This is unacceptable during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The city also is planning an additional 3,000 housing units in the next two years, a woefully inadequate response to the overwhelming need. 10,000 people are currently homeless and 333,060 people are on the waiting list for social housing with the average wait time being more than a decade. The city's response is a failure.

We urge you to act now to resolve this dire situation. We ask you to commit to the following actions.

1. Implement an immediate moratorium on forced evictions of encampment residents and temporary shelters from public spaces.
2. Open at least 2,000 new shelter-hotel rooms in the next 4 months. This is the only way people will have a safe alternative to living outside in encampments, given that shelters are currently full. For these sites to be successful and truly safe for people:
  - All sites must have overdose prevention services and support on-site that is provided by experienced harm-reduction staff.
  - Half of the sites must be located in the downtown core, to ensure people aren't disconnected from critical services and their communities.
3. Provide services to people in encampments.
  - Provide \$1 million to community agencies to distribute survival supplies and fire safety equipment to encamped individuals.
  - Ensure people have access to indoor facilities twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week – including access to winterized bathrooms and showers for encampments adjacent to City sites.

We hope to see an adequate response to this urgent issue as winter is now here.

Sincerely,

Danielle Koyama  
on behalf of Japanese Canadians for Social Justice  
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