

SKYE WALLACE
DEPUTATION ON EC18.6

I want to thank the Chair and the Committee for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Skye Wallace, I'm a musician in Toronto and have been volunteering with the Encampment Support Network since the summer. I'm one of nearly 500 members of the Toronto Music Community who released a statement on Friday opposing encampment clearings and calling for a moratorium on evictions.

I started volunteering with ESN because they exist in the face of great need of the residents of these encampments. That need is constantly shifting with the changing weather, lack of support and access to resources, and navigating the obstacles and impacts of a global pandemic. During my time taking part in outreach work, there has been no access provided from the city to water, to sustenance, to warm clothing and survival gear, to meals, or harm reduction. In my experience with the folks who live in encampments in Trinity Bellwoods park - as far as central intake numbers go - the majority of the time people's needs and requests go unanswered or they are told that there is no space for them after ages of trying. When there is space, the option often doesn't suit their needs. It can be isolating. It can be far away. It can have less access to amenities than the park. Congregate settings can be dangerous for the immunocompromised.

People are their own experts in themselves and what they need. And it is the people in the encampments we should be consulting on these matters involving housing and keeping people safe this winter.

Some councillors have publicly assured that there won't be encampment clearings in their wards. If that's the case, putting a moratorium on evictions won't be very difficult to do.

There is a history of mistrust of the city and staff in these communities. Just the other day, a resident that I've known for some months now had the belongings surrounding his tent cleared while he wasn't present, things like pots and pans that he needed to cook, his garbage can to keep his area clean, things that he needed in order to be self-sufficient. A set back like that, at this time of year, can be deadly. You could tell he was trying so hard to hide how upset he was as he told us this story.

With the possible threat of clearings looming, residents do not trust that they will not come, as their trust has been broken over and over again with the demonstrated lack of care for our most vulnerable.

Just yesterday, one resident I'm particularly close with told me that the stress of everything is causing her health to deteriorate. The fear of not knowing what is to come, who is going to be taking pictures of their residence, when a clearing might happen on a moment's notice, without an option of a place to go that suits their needs - that fear does a number on someone's health. It creates chaos. It has a deep emotional impact. And they need everything they have to survive this winter.

This is an opportunity to build trust. This is an opportunity to consult the community that is in need. This is an opportunity to look after each other like every public statement has advertised since the start of COVID.

I was really nervous about speaking today. I spoke about this to the resident I mentioned earlier and she said to me "you will be in my heart, you can do it." These months that I've spent getting to know these people have been unlike anything I've known and I have a deep love for them in my heart. They are worthy of safe space. They are worthy of being consulted on their futures. And while this opportunity to speak myself is very appreciated, this opportunity is not accessible to them.

Thank you for listening.