



January 25, 2021

His Worship John Tory, Mayor of Toronto
Chair, Executive Committee
100 Queen Street West,
Toronto ON
M5H 2N2

Dear Mr. Mayor and Members of the Executive Committee,

I am writing to you from Habitat Services to express our strongest support for the City Manager's recommendations to the Executive Committee for the Community Crisis Support Service pilot.

Habitat Services has contracts with non-profit and private sector landlords who provide housing to individuals with serious mental health challenges. We provide community based mental health and housing support to tenants. Habitat Services believes that a non-police crisis response service will greatly benefit the individuals and communities we serve. In view of the ever-increasing number of police interventions in mental health crises that have ended in tragedy, the need for an alternative has never been more critical.

Individuals with lived experience of mental health challenges, trained in de-escalation and trauma-informed crisis support should form an integral component of the crisis response. The effectiveness of responders with lived experience, or peer workers, has been compellingly demonstrated in research. Response teams should include peer workers as active and equal members. The service should be available 24/7 and there should be rapid access through 911.

Habitat Services would also like to voice its strong support for culturally appropriate and equitable crisis response services for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour communities. Further consultation and engagement of these communities, as referenced in the City Manager's report, and the proposed development of an Indigenous led pilot are urgently needed. Not only will a culturally appropriate, non-police crisis response result in greater health and wellness for individuals with mental health challenges and our communities, it will literally save lives.

We urge the Executive Committee to approve this pilot, and to allocate the resources and support it needs as it moves ahead. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joanne Knutson,
Executive Director,
Habitat Services