



October 26, 2021

To: Toronto City Council Executive Committee

Re: Agenda Item EX 27.14

As a network of homelessness service providers providing on-the-ground supports for people sleeping rough, the Toronto Drop-in Network has stood against the forcible removal of encampments long before the shameful actions we saw this past summer in Trinity Bellwoods, Alexandra Park, and Lamport Stadium. We understood that removing people from their encampments enacts significant trauma, and is against public health recommendations as well as international human rights law.

In our services, the displacement of our participants from parks leads to disconnection: evictions effectively disrupt the supportive relationships and services residents rely on from TDIN agencies, and they push them further away from us – both physically, as well as psychologically. That is, evictions inflict substantial amounts of stress on encampment residents leading up to, during, and post-eviction, and our agencies have seen this result in declining mental health and increased substance use among those evicted. People have also gone missing, and we have also seen people die, including Jerry, who overdosed at the Novotel two days after his eviction from Alexandra Park. For these reasons, our Network – your agency partners in ensuring the health and wellbeing of unhoused Torontonians – have [continuously advocated for a human rights-compliant approach to working with encampments, the direct provision of the necessities of life to people living in parks, and an end to encampment evictions.](#)

Unfortunately, our expertise and voice as homelessness service providers has been ignored. Instead, the City of Toronto has launched a violent, militarized approach to removing encampments in violation of its obligations to human rights, as per the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and international covenants; the right to housing, as outlined in the National Housing Strategy Act; and public health recommendations from the United Nations, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health Ontario, and MAP Health. Evictions were carried out in order to uphold municipal bylaws, which in no way supersede Toronto's aforementioned legal obligations, as defined by national and international law. Pertinent to Agenda Item EX 27.14, evictions in Trinity Bellwoods, Alexandra Park, and Lamport Stadium (July 20) were executed using a heavy police presence, which was grossly disproportionate to the number of people living in encampments facing eviction – [just 51 individuals total](#). This also came at a great financial expense: [the combined staffing cost of police during the](#)



[three encampment evictions amounted to \\$388,192.76 in public dollars](#). While the city has cited that police were deployed to “ensure the safety of staff, encampment occupants, and the general public,” we know that the outcome was not one of safety, but of extreme violence.

Speaking for myself, I was physically present at the three encampment evictions as a witness, and as a professional with expertise on housing and homelessness. I am not a “professional protestor,” but rather an advocate for drop-in services and the people who use them, including many encampment residents. I saw violence enacted by police against advocates, but also against unhoused people, including park residents, other sector professionals, an elected politician, and a political candidate. I was indirectly pepper sprayed on two occasions, and pushed by police onto the ground, which resulted in a sprained wrist. My goal was to bear witness to the supports being provided to encampment residents during each eviction, not to “instigate.” So why was I assaulted? I am an arms-length city employee.

Beyond the actions of police, which resulted in numerous injuries, particularly at Lamport Stadium, the presence of police in encampments is inherent violence. Full stop. When city communications state that police are present to ensure safety for encampment residents, it is failing to understand that unhoused people – who are overly criminalized, and [account for 10% of all Toronto Police interactions](#) – do not feel safe in their presence. When the city offers indoor spaces to people, all while they are circumscribed inside fencing with dozens of police present, any choice made by an encampment resident is done under duress. This makes their choice to come indoors not a choice at all, but rather coercion. And coercion absolutely is violence.

Fortunately, recent weeks have seen the City of Toronto [change its approach to working with encampments in Dufferin Grove](#) and Bellevue Park. This is laudable, and the meaningful engagement, individualized support, and provision of resources on-site are aligned with what we at the Toronto Drop-in Network have outlined in our advocacy, particularly in [A Path Forward](#). Encampments are not being removed, police are not being deployed to enforce no trespass orders, and information is being provided surrounding indoor space and housing options so that encampment residents can make free and informed decisions around where they go. This must be made official municipal policy for supporting encampments, and expanded to be the de facto approach for supporting all Torontonians sleeping rough.



This said, we cannot turn a blind eye to the extreme and violent actions of police in encampments this summer, and especially in Lamport Stadium. For this reason, we at TDIN call on Mayor John Tory and City Council to implement the following:

1. Order a public judicial inquiry into encampment evictions to investigate the actions of Toronto Police. A [request for a judicial inquiry was put forward in a motion by Councillors Josh Matlow and Mike Layton](#), but was voted down at City Council. Their request must be reconsidered; and
2. End the policing and eviction of encampments; and
3. Adopt and implement the recommendations of A Path Forward.

Many thanks to the Executive Committee for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Diana McNally'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being more prominent.

Diana Chan McNally
Training and Engagement Coordinator
Toronto Drop-in Network