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Economic and Community Development Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Re: EC1.5 - COVID-19 Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan Update 2023

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

As Chair of The Board of Management of The 519, a City Agency committed to the health, happiness, and full participation of 2SLGBTQ+ communities, I am writing to express our support to keep hotel-shelter beds open and operating until a suitable relocation plan to permanent housing is in place.

The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted deep systemic disparities and exposed critical failings in our social infrastructure. Prior to the pandemic, Toronto was already in a housing crisis which now has only worsened. This update clearly shows that the majority of emergency shelter residents end up back in the shelter system, with upwards of 25% of people in unknown locations unable to access services. While this report does not include disaggregated data, there is evidence that already marginalized communities will deeply feel this impact.

Our experience in working closely with Streets to Homes and hotel shelter providers in successfully placing chronically homeless community members in shelter hotels speaks to the importance of these spaces. Without these essential services, residents, particularly 2SLGBTQ+ communities and Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, will continue to choose to live on the streets, as it unfortunately often a safer choice than a congregate shelter setting.

In November 2022, The 519 worked closely with Homes First Society to open Toronto's first shelter space for LGBTQ+ adults, with a focus on refugees and trans women. This space filled up in a matter of days, which speaks to the desperate need to creating more permanent, affirming spaces where residents can access wrap around services and support in finding transitional and affordable housing.

It is time for the City of Toronto to truly embody housing as a human right and prioritize the safety and security of all its residents, including opening up more supportive, transitional and affordable housing options; broadening affordable rental programs, and keeping emergency shelters operating until a plan to relocate to housing is in place.

We are committed to continuing to work with our colleagues in SSHA, the housing and shelter sector, and our communities in creating a shelter and housing system where no one is left behind, and no one is left in the cold.

Sincerely,

Paul Jonathan Saguil (He/Him)
Board Chair, The 519