

Shelley Carroll, Chair
Economic and Community Development Committee
City of Toronto

January 10th, 2023

Dear Councillor Carroll and committee members:

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

As a Street Nurse, I work with people who are unhoused and rely on the shelter system for a bed to keep safe. Over the years, myself and my colleagues have met many times with people to try to get shelters beds, only to be denied a space in an already crowded system. Being denied a shelter bed is a matter of life or death. We have seen this time and time again.

Closing shelter-hotels knowingly puts people at risk of injury and death, especially during times of extreme weather. People need shelter and housing to live. We know from recent data that multiple people are turned away from a shelter bed every single night, leaving nowhere for people to go. Closing existing spaces will only increase the amount of people we push toward harm's way.

Pushing toward harm's way means many things. Firstly, Toronto is a city that experiences extreme weather: both hot and cold. During the cold months, we often see people with cold-weather related injuries such as frostbite and hypothermia. Tragically, we also see people who die outside every year due to freezing deaths. These are injuries and deaths that are preventable had there been safe and accessible housing or shelter available for all.

Along with this, we harm people by displacing them from their community, social and health supports and left to survive on their own. Constantly being pushed out with nowhere to go is highly traumatizing and dangerous, and in a rich city like Toronto, there is no excuse for this. Continuously displacing people makes it harder for people to reach their much-needed supports, in many cases the support people need to live such as accessing health care, harm reduction services, food resources, social networks and more.

We see every month that more names are added to the Toronto Homeless Memorial. We know that the city made the decision to increase the police budget while cutting resources for people who are unhoused. These decisions kill and we demand better.

In the absence of truly affordable housing, we need to keep the shelter-hotels in place and add at least 2000 more non-congregate shelter beds to the system to ensure no one is denied a space. We need to end encampment evictions and the inhumane displacement of people across the city. We need to keep open low-barrier warming centers all winter season for people to access to avoid cold-weather related injuries. We are in a crisis and we need the city to act on it.

Thank you,
-Roxie Danielson RN, Street Nurse