



TO: Economic and Community Development Committee (ECDC)

DATE: Wednesday, January 11, 2023

RE: **COVID-19 Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan Update 2023** (EC1.5)

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH). The TAEH is a network of partners reaching across the city, all united in the vision of ending homelessness. We also serve as your non-Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and co-chair the Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning Forum with the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration (SSHA) and the Housing Secretariat.

We are here today to express our support of the recommendation that the City of Toronto extend the majority of lease and license agreements at temporary shelter sites until April 2024, inclusive of the necessary ancillary services that would support those programs, and to confirm and amplify the concern from SSHA that closing these spaces would result in significant and potentially deadly consequences for Toronto's most vulnerable unhoused citizens.

While we commend City Council for the April 2022 approval of temporary shelter lease extensions through to April 2023 and acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the City to meet the growing demands of the shelter system, TAEH and its partners remain firmly committed to increased permanent housing opportunities as the real solution to homelessness, and to ongoing work towards homelessness prevention. At the same time however, until permanent housing strategies gain adequate traction, we must also be vigilant and responsive to the immediate needs of unhoused people in our community. This cannot be done by further reducing the spaces that people rely on for shelter in the interim.

During the 2022 Toronto Municipal Election, TAEH's Pledge to End Homelessness campaign gained significant momentum and support from many of the newly elected Toronto City Councillors. In that [Pledge](#), we urged candidates to ensure that ending homelessness is a top city priority in this term, and to set minimum housing access targets for people experiencing homelessness in Toronto.

The only way to reduce homelessness is to ensure that more people have obtained housing each month than the number of people becoming homeless, creating more outflow than inflow into homelessness. We urge the Committee to be mindful of this commitment and to work with us and City staff over the next few months to set these targets for outflow, while at the same time ensuring that appropriate resources are allocated to SSHA so that the shelter system can continue to offer life-saving services and supports to people who need them now. Extending the lease and license agreements at the temporary shelter sites will ensure that there is no net loss in capacity and mitigate the challenges that the sector sees as imminent.

As reported by [General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, the Executive Director, Corporate Real Estate Management and the Acting Chief Procurement Officer](#), The City of Toronto has over 8,600 people in the shelter system nightly, over half of whom have been homeless for over six months. The [daily occupancy capacity for the shelter system is almost 100%](#) across all shelters, including sites that are proposed for closure. Most recent data from December reports that Central Intake has only been able to match an average of 21 people seeking respite every day, leaving 118 individuals turned away night after night (*COVID-19 Shelter Transition and Relocation Plan Update 2023, page 6*). And this is only including those calls that make it through to Central Intake – the demand for shelter spaces is so high that community members have reported an inability to even reach Central Intake, and when they can they are told there are no beds.

Of these unhoused community members, 24% are youth. In Toronto, there are only 276 emergency and 181 transitional shelter beds available for young people, both sitting consistently between 95%-99% full night over night.

If the youth temporary site closes in April, as we have reason to believe it slated to do so, it will result in a loss of 125 beds – this is one-third of current capacity and just over 100 beds fewer than existed for youth than before the pandemic began. These closures will not just result in a loss of temporary sites, but a net loss of shelter beds overall for youth. The TAEH asks that this Committee recommend to Council that all efforts be made to keep this site open, at least until an effective transition plan can be secured for these youth. And, if this is not possible, secure a new site in time for a seamless transition in April.

While preserving the shelter bed capacity for youth is an immediate priority, it is also crucial for the Committee to hear and recognize that there is eagerness across the sector to develop partnerships that will create permanent solutions for youth during the transition, and evidence-based models in development that offer an opportunity to intervene on the transition from youth to adult homelessness.

The temporary sites across the city have offered safety to many vulnerable populations who are so often over-represented in street homelessness, and for whom limited resources exist already. For example, sites supporting seniors as well as refugee populations are at risk of closure if the leases are not extended, and the reality is that there are not adequate populations-specific services available to support these communities if they are left without the temporary stability of the shelter hotels.

We understand and acknowledge that Toronto alone cannot solve this crisis. As the report stated, provincial and federal partnerships have contributed to the creation of new affordable and supportive housing opportunities, but much more needs to be done. Investments from the federal and provincial governments will support a more targeted and rapid increase to the affordable housing supply, and TAEH is committed to urging action from other orders of government, including advocating for immediate action in response to the report, and for increased capital for non-profit housing development as well as increased housing benefits.

There is no doubt that the City, the community serving people experiencing homelessness, and most importantly those actually experiencing homelessness, are facing unprecedented challenges right now. As the report notes, there are twice as many people in our shelter system today than there were just six

years ago, and that number is not met with adequate housing and shelter resources. We must all work more closely together, sharing evidence-based information and testing innovative strategies. This will require increased transparency in future shelter transition planning work and increased partnership and engagement opportunities between the City and the community. The TAEH, along with our partner the Toronto Shelter Network, looks forward to the potential of the increased meaningful collaboration with both SSHA and the Housing Secretariat in our new, shared table addressing systems improvements to do just that.

CONCLUSION

Quite simply, there is nowhere for people to go. TAEH, TSN, and many others have noted that the shelter system is at a breaking point, and further closures will only exacerbate the system pressures, leaving hundreds of unhoused Torontonians with no options.

As SSHA has already named, closing these spaces will “cause significant disruption to the vital services delivered through the sites and the vulnerable Torontonians who rely upon them.” But more than service disruption, these closures will lead to a crisis that many vulnerable people will not be able to survive.

With this proposal on the table so early into the term, it presents an opportunity for this Committee to demonstrate a commitment to making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring by prioritizing access shelter and services in the immediate future, and we urge openness and transparency from the City on the plan for relocation, housing, and supports moving forward.

Thank you,

Kira Heineck
Executive Director
kira@taeh.ca

TAEH Steering Committee

Canadian Mental Health Association, Toronto
Community Living Toronto
COTA
Covenant House Toronto
Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services
Fife House
Fred Victor Centre
Homes First Society
Houselink & Mainstay Community Housing

John Howard Society - Toronto
Loft Community Services
Madison Community Services
The Access Point
Toronto Developmental Services Alliance
United Way of Greater Toronto
Wellesley Institute
WoodGreen Community Services