

October 24, 2023

Attn: Economic and Community Development Committee | cc: Toronto City Council, Office of the Mayor
re: *EC7.8 Shelter System Pressures and Responses, Including Planning for Winter 2023/2024*

Dear Economic and Community Development Committee Members,

I am writing in response to the City's current winter plan, which includes 170 warming centre spaces and a 40-bed respite. In the midst of a housing crisis, after City Council [voted in May](#) to declare homelessness an emergency, this is deeply inadequate. In what emergency situation is it acceptable to wait months to implement an inadequate response while people are forced outside and into unsafe settings? This emergency disproportionately impacts poor, disabled, Black, Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+ and marginalized communities on stolen land. This is state-sanctioned violence and abandonment: an emergency that is a direct result of reckless and murderous social policies.

The [City's own data](#) indicates that in September there were at least 273 unmatched calls daily to Central Intake. These calls are not just numbers. They are individuals facing a daily life or death situation trying to survive ongoing displacement, dehumanization and organized abandonment. This is a decades-long emergency situation that the City has failed to adequately address for years, as the financialization of housing and gentrification continue to exacerbate the housing emergency.

As a therapist working with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth existing at many intersections, I see the ways that multiply marginalized individuals in our society are particularly abandoned and displaced by decision-makers with power. Operating within budget constraints of a previous administration should not cost people their lives or render their humanity invisible. I constantly witness how young people in our society are repeatedly let down by governments and elected officials who participate in dehumanizing decisions that have real impacts on people's lives and survival. In the past two years, an unprecedented number of people have died in Toronto while unhoused.

In August, a collective of organizations and advocacy groups signed on to the Shelter and Housing Justice Network's [Housing Emergency Letter](#) demanding the City take immediate action to ensure safe shelter and housing for all. The City must ensure that unhoused people survive this winter with dignity and humanity. As a Toronto resident, I urge you to take the following steps with the urgency required:

1. Open emergency sites immediately to ensure that people have access to indoor space with livable conditions and appropriately trained staff. Until adequate shelter is available, extend operations of all warming centres to be low-barrier, year-round, 24-hour respite spaces with surge capacity for extreme weather. Demand promised funds from the federal government to support refugees and asylum seekers accessing shelter services.
2. Implement a moratorium on encampment clearings and evictions from shelter-hotels. Stop the harassment of residents and destruction of survival gear. Divest from policing and harassing marginalized communities and invest in providing access to safe shelter and housing.
3. Address the financialization of the housing market through measures including expropriation of properties, including 214-230 Sherbourne Street, prohibitive vacant unit and land transfer taxes and implementing requirements for rent-gear-to-income rental units in all new builds.

I look forward to hearing how the ECDC will implement measures to prevent death and injury this winter.

Signed,

Atia Haq
Registered Psychotherapist | Toronto Resident - Ward 11