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March 17, 2023
Toronto City Hall
Infrastructure and Environment Committee
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

RE: IE2.8 Request for First Year Review of Winter Maintenance Contracts and Addressing Obstructed Sidewalks with Snow and Ice

We are writing to **support Councillor Saxe and Councillor Carroll's motion to review snow removal contracts**. The snow removal situation for people outside of cars is a perennial issue that is unsafe for people simply trying to walk, roll or bike. Winter is an annual Canadian tradition. It happens every year. Snowfall is forecasted in advance; it is never a surprise. Many winter cities have got snow clearing largely figured out, and it is an expectation that Torontonians deserve to have met.

Recently, a senior broke their ankle due to inadequate snow clearing. After every snowfall, social media and news stories are filled with photographic evidence: devastating injuries from falls, parents struggling to lift strollers over snow banks, piles of snow and ice blocking crosswalks and sidewalks, seniors struggling to cross the road, people with disabilities needing help to access the streetcar. Even the most able bodied people face significant mobility challenges when the sidewalks and bike lanes are uncleared, slippery or icy.

FFSS would like to see our city prioritize the safety of people traveling outside of cars. Safe conditions for a vehicle are not the same for people walking, rolling or biking.

A personal story: I tried to travel to Queens Park to support the tabling of Bill 40, Moving Ontarians Safely Act, on November 16, 2022, the first major snow event in the city. I hadn't had a chance to get my winter tires installed on my car, so I chose to ride my winter bike with studded tires rather than risk anyone else's safety by driving in snow with summer tires. I had heard about improved snow-clearing standards and improved service on cycling infrastructure, but saw absolutely no evidence of it that day. During the morning rush hour, most of my route was dangerously uncleared, if not actively obstructed: Dundas St E, Sherbourne, Wellesley, and University. 8 continuous kilometres of inadequacy and inaction on display in cycling infrastructure, while the whole way lanes for cars were cleared bare to the pavement. At multiple stretches it was too deep to even ride in, and I had to get off and slowly push my bike on foot, risking being late for the press conference I was going to. Nobody had to get out of their car and push it because of uncleared snow.

This failure is a policy choice, and it is counterproductive in every way: it reduces active transportation by scaring people off, it undermines road safety and climate goals, and it shows anyone outside of a car how little regard there is for their safe passage, with motorists instead being the sole recipient of rapid, effective snow clearing services. It has long term negative effects too: I have ridden my bike exactly once in the 4 months since then, and I am

far from the only one too scared to ride in winter because I simply cannot trust that an effective job at snow clearing will have been done so that I can ride safely in dedicated infrastructure. Instead, I drive my car because I don't want to die by being forced by mounds of uncleared snow into the path of an oncoming distracted, speeding or rage-fueled motorists. I am enraged that this city routinely takes away my choice for healthy and active mobility, and instead forces me into the least healthy, least sustainable and most expensive choice.

We urge you to vote to undertake this review and find solutions to inadequate, inequitable or incompetent snow clearing, like preventing snow from being plowed by either city operators or private contractors into crosswalks, sidewalks and cycling infrastructure, by tendering contracts to more competitive and competent service providers, and by implementing and enforcing penalties on incompetent providers that are effective at motivating them to improve their service levels to acceptable, safe standards. Nobody should be too scared to leave their house because of the condition of our streets. **Every resident deserves to be safe on our streets.**

Sincerely,



Jessica Spieker, Spokesperson
Friends and Families for Safe Streets