

To: Executive Committee
Date: Tuesday December 17, 2024
Re: CC24.1 Ombudsman Toronto Report: An Investigation into the City's Decision to Stop Allowing Refugee Claimants into Base Shelter System Beds.

The Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness (TAEH) is a community-based collective impact initiative dedicated to ending homelessness in Toronto. Our network includes organizations that provide vital supports –including services and supportive housing– to individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

While the City ultimately reversed the decision to turn away refugees from shelter beds and rightly pointed to Federal and Provincial failures to address the crisis of homelessness in Toronto, we believe that is instrumental that reports and recommendations from the Ombudsman Toronto office must be met with concrete action, and that the City must urgently reconsider its position that the right to housing is “aspirational” and reaffirm its commitment to realizing the right to housing by implementing recommendations laid out by the Ombudsman.

Across Canada, including in Ontario, courts recognize the existence of a right to housing, ***including access to shelter spaces***, as set out in the following instruments:

1. The right to life and dignity as protected by the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.
2. The rights of Indigenous Peoples as protected by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and *Declaration Act*.
3. The right to equality protected in the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)*, the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the *Human Rights Code* of Canada and of the provinces.
4. The right to adequate housing as protected in the *ICESCR* and incorporated by reference into the *National Housing Strategy Act*.

TAEH supports the recommendations outlined in the Ombudsman Report on the City's decision to stop allowing refugee claimants into base shelter system beds. We the City to implement these recommendations to ensure fair and equitable shelter access in our community. We are especially supportive of:

Recommendation 2: TAEH encourages City Council include the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Advisory Committee and the Housing Rights Advisory Committee to the bodies reviewing all future changes to refugee claimant shelter eligibility to ensure fair, equitable, and informed decision-making.

Recommendation 5: TAEH supports scaling training on the Anti-Black Racism Analysis tool to ensure all shelter policy staff are trained by June 1 2025. We also encourage the training be available to senior leadership and those responsible for governance, such as board members, to foster accountability and systemic change across all levels of decision-making.

Recommendation 6: TAEH urges any framework for analyzing shelter changes under the Toronto Housing Charter include meaningful input from the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Advisory Committee, the Housing Rights Advisory Committee, and community stakeholders, including service operating organizations. These insights will ensure equitable outcomes.

Recommendation 10: TAEH supports holding roundtable discussions with refugee-claimant-serving organizations and housing advocates to foster collaborative, community-driven approaches to meeting needs in the shelter system. We would also recommend ensuring that the TAEH as the CAB, the Indigenous Community Advisory Board, and people with lived or living experience of accessing refugee-claimant services are included.

Recommendation 11: TAEH strongly urges the development of a comprehensive strategy for meaningfully engaging with refugee claimants and the organizations that serve them in planning and delivering shelter services. Ensuring refugees have a seat at the table will build a more responsive shelter system that meets their needs.

Recommendation 13: TAEH supports the inclusion of key stakeholders in TSSS consultations on data collection, use, and presentation to ensure transparency and accountability in tracking progress toward realizing the right to housing.

Thank you,
Savhanna J Wilson



Acting Executive Director
Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness