



Dear Members of Economic and Community Development Committee,

I am writing this letter in response to the City's Encampment approach and strategy. First I would like to acknowledge that we are in dire straits with regards to housing issues within our city. Shelters have operated above capacity for numerous years prior to the pandemic and the recent shelter safety report speaks to the ongoing issues within our shelter system. Of course there are complex circumstances that further exasperate these situations, however these encampments are a symptom of our broken system where shelters are over packed, and affordable housing is practically non-existent in our city.

This approach and strategy represents a first step towards some clarity as to what our city will do, and though I appreciate the sentiment of being held accountable to preserving human rights as per the stated strategy regarding encampment removal, there is no mention of any of the encampment residents being canvassed for input and/or given autonomy as to what ought to be done. This is another sign that there is much work to be done as to affirming the capacity of our underhoused population and I hope this strategy and others like it will better reflect reciprocal approaches where our marginalized populations are seen as valued neighbours, capable of having input over what solutions are possible.

I would like to also further address those who see our underhoused Torontonians as a mere nuisance in their neighbourhood. Some have sent letters and will depute their concerns today, outlining the "inconveniences" these encampments have brought to their lives and livelihood. Though I myself along with my family have been victimized by increased crime on our streets and safety issues my own neighbourhood (Leslieville), I remain steadfast in my commitment to care for those in the margins of our society. When we are blessed with more, we have a moral obligation to recognize that our privilege comes with responsibility. Our fears do not give us permission to dehumanize our marginalized populations and we as a city should aspire towards transformative solutions as opposed to focusing on our own grievances.

May we all remain steadfast and I urge our city leaders along with everyone in our city to pursue the betterment of our city which includes caring for those in the margins.

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