

Toronto City Council
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, Ontario

April 6, 2024

Attention: Toronto City Council

**RE: Supporting a Barrier-Free Long-Term Land Lease with the
Somali Centre for Culture and Recreation for City-Owned Land**

Dear Mayor Chow and City Councillors,

We are writing in support of the Somali Centre for Culture and Recreation (SCCR)'s request for a long-term land lease with the City of Toronto. The project led by SCCR will build an important place of belonging for the Somali community, one of Canada's largest Black communities. It is planned as an important public space, which is much needed in our city at this time and it will be a focal point for Somali creativity, community work, recreation, and for archiving Somali culture and heritage in Canada.

Nia Centre for the Arts is a Toronto-based charity with a mission to support, promote and showcase art from the Afro-diaspora. We recently re-opened our 14,000 sq ft space at 524 Oakwood following a \$12-M renovation that transformed our facility into Canada's first professional Black arts centre. Given this work, we all too well the challenges facing organizations serving equity-deserving communities without space and social infrastructure to do so. Based on our experience as a long-operating Black arts organization, we know there are significant inequities within the community serving ecosystem. For decades, we have seen a lack of funding for organizations and spaces serving Black communities. This work will only get harder as the cost of construction rises and we prioritize housing over social and third spaces. That's why we need to support this initiative.

The City of Toronto has a historic opportunity to respond to over 40 years of community organizing to realize the SCCR social infrastructure project, fulfill a local need to animate public spaces, deliver on vital amenities such as the proposed cultural spaces, childcare, gymnasium, aquatic facility, and public realm improvements.

We urge you to immediately and unanimously adopt a positive decision that advances a long-term land lease for the SCCR and to clearly demonstrate the city's unwavering commitment to barrier-free investments in Black-led social infrastructure projects.

Sincerely,

Alica Hall
Executive Director
Nia Centre for the Arts