

Identifying and Addressing Pressures in the Refugee and Emergency Shelter System

Date: March 19, 2025

To: City Council

From: Mayor Olivia Chow

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mayor recommends that:

1. City Council consider the attached reports and communications on equitable access to Toronto's shelter and housing system.

SUMMARY AND COMMENTS

Since March 2020, the number of refugee claimants and asylum seekers accommodated in the City of Toronto's shelter system has increased from an average of 2,329 people sheltered each night to 4,181 people accommodated on average in March of this year. Over this same period, the City has consistently sheltered between 4,900-6,400 people experiencing homelessness each night. And we know that hundreds more are turned away every night due to lack of capacity.

Everyone deserves a roof over their head. Refugee claimants, asylum seekers, and people experiencing homelessness deserve dignified shelter and housing. No one should be forced to sleep on the street or in parks.

In July 2023, City Council took steps to address the crisis overwhelming the refugee and general shelter systems, including increasing funding through the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit to provide more rent supplements, preserving refugee-serving shelter spaces to meet the unique needs of refugees while ensuring everyone regardless of status is able to access the City's shelter system as spaces become available, requesting the Federal Government establish a refugee reception centre for those arriving at Pearson Airport, and securing funding through the federal Interim Housing Assistance Program (IHAP) to cover the costs of supporting existing refugee claimants in Toronto's shelter system.

Since then, City Council has also adopted the Shelter Infrastructure Plan and the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy, has invested in creating hundreds of new supportive housing units, increased City contributions to rent

supplements, and engaged refugee-serving organizations to better inform the City's response to overwhelming demand.

City Council has an obligation to consider how the City of Toronto's shelter system can best serve the growing needs for emergency shelter. There are many important considerations to take into account as was made clear by the recent report from the City of Toronto Ombudsman, *An Investigation into the City's Decision to Stop Allowing Refugee Claimants into Base Shelter System Beds*. Since December 2024 when this report was received, the City has been informed of several funding changes to critical federal programs that support refugees and asylum seekers including the Interim Housing Assistance Program and the Local Immigration Partnership program, and we have information from the UNHCR on migration trends. Further considerations on this matter have since been raised by the City's Housing Rights Advisory Committee, Confronting Anti-Black Racism Advisory Committee, and Chair of the Economic and Community Development Committee. These reports and briefing notes are attached to this item for City Council's consideration.

SIGNATURE

Olivia Chow
Mayor

ATTACHMENTS

- Ombudsman Toronto Report – An Investigation into the City's Decision to Stop Allowing Refugee Claimants into Base Shelter System Beds
- Letter from Deputy Mayor Morley, Chair of the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Advisor Committee
- Letter from Councillor Bravo, Chair of the Economic & Community Development Committee
- Letter from Councillor Perks and Elizabeth McIsaac, on behalf of the Housing Rights Advisory Committee
- Briefing Note from Toronto Shelter and Support Services: Update on City of Toronto's Refugee Response and Impact of New IHAP Directives
- Briefing Note from Toronto Shelter and Support Services: Summary of Toronto Shelter and Support Services Work in Response to Ombudsman's Report: An Investigation into the City's Decision to Stop Allowing Refugee Claimants into Base Shelter System Beds
- Briefing Note from Social Development, Finance & Administration: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Funding Cuts: Impacts on Direct and Indirect Services in Toronto
- Slide Deck from the UNHCR on Global Trends in Forced Displacement, presented to a meeting hosted by Councillor Bravo with refugee service providers in February 2025