

Mayor Olivia Chow
City Hall, 2nd Floor
100 Queen St. W.
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

March 25th, 2025

RE: CC28.2 - Identifying and Addressing Pressures in the Refugee and Emergency Shelter System

Dear Mayor Chow,

As a proud City of Toronto Agency, Canada's largest LGBTQ+ refugee service provider, and partners in service provision for Toronto's only 2SLGBTQ+ specific adult shelter space, The 519 is writing to urge you and Council to uphold housing as a human right through implementation of the recommendations of Ombudsman Toronto's *An Investigation into the City's Decision to Stop Allowing Refugee Claimants into Base Shelter System Beds* report.

The 519's broad range of supports include our New to Canada program. In 2023 alone, we provided community support and services for 15,290+ LGBTQ refugees and newcomers, the majority of whom are Black. Many of our clients were displaced across various Ontario municipalities as a result of the decision to exclude them from accessing shelters in Toronto during this period of time. In many cases, clients ended up in regions where there is not the community infrastructure in place to provide LGBTQ+ and gender affirming care.

In some cases, this led to these individuals facing further homophobia and transphobia; inappropriate disclosure of HIV status. In many cases clients felt forced to hide for fear of stigma and discrimination. To this day, we continue to support many clients throughout Ontario – in places as far away as Windsor, Cornwall, and Thunder Bay.

While we appreciate the pressures the shelter system was (and is) under to respond to the housing and shelter crisis, the decision did not consider the impacts on individuals or the organizations who support them.

As you consider how the City of Toronto's shelter system can best serve the needs for LGBTQ+ Refugees into the future, we urge you to:

- Implement the recommendations found in the Ombudsman's report;
- Ensure that any update to TSSS's 2SLGBTQ+ Directives reflects the specific needs of LGBTQ+ refugees, including tracking implementation metrics, and mandatory training for city staff and contracted service providers; and
- Ensures that the development and expansion of the refugee shelter system reflects the specific needs of LGBTQ+ refugees.

The 519 is committed to continuing to work with City Divisions, service providers, and your office to ensure that the needs of LGBTQ+ refugees and 2SLGBTQ+ communities more broadly are adequately met by the shelter system. Given our decades of experience working with both

LGBTQ+ refugees and in providing training to staff and service providers within the shelter system, we are uniquely situated to work with the City to ensure that it implements a human rights-based approach to providing shelter that meets the needs of the diverse communities seeking shelter.

Sincerely,



Tom Spence
Chair of the Board of Management
The 519



Maura Lawless
Executive Director
The 519