

Dear Mayor Olivia Chow and Members of City Council,

We are a group of nonpartisan community groups and non-profit organizations across Toronto with deep concerns about a new bylaw that will be considered at the City Council meeting in May 2025. We believe that the proposed [Demonstrations Bylaw to Protect Vulnerable Institutions](#) could restrict our right to protest within the city and limit our Charter-protected rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Many of us have also expressed concerns about the consultation process, as outlined in a [joint letter to the City Manager](#).

Marginalized groups have used these fundamental freedoms to advocate for the many social and policy changes that we now as a society can enjoy. From strikes and picket lines to vigils and rallies, public demonstrations have been used to help win rights for workers and tenants, Indigenous, racialized and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, as well as protections for the environment, and for families fleeing violence.

However, the City of Toronto is considering a [bylaw to restrict certain kinds of peaceful demonstrations](#) outside of what they call “vulnerable institutions,” which in other jurisdictions have included places of worship, faith-based schools, cultural institutions, child care centres, and congregate settings like seniors’ homes. If passed, we are concerned that the “bubble zone” bylaw could limit our Charter-protected rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, silence marginalized communities’ voices in particular, lead to police overreach, and inadequately respond to hate. The passing of a bylaw in Toronto may also have implications for other jurisdictions in Ontario and would restrict groups outside of Toronto from protesting within Toronto’s boundaries, including Queen’s Park.

The City’s policy framework claims that it is designed to keep Torontonians safe from hate, and that it is not intended to prohibit “lawful” demonstrations. Yet the police already have extensive powers to address a range of conduct that is not physically violent during protests. Broad rules enabling government censorship is not the answer here. The [Canadian Civil Liberties Association \(CCLA\)](#) has expressed concerns that broad rules may unfairly restrict Charter-protected peaceful demonstrations and free speech, and that such laws often harm marginalized groups who rely on protest to advocate for social change.

Many of us represent marginalized communities that the bylaw is purporting to protect. We deliver services for seniors, children and youth (including childcare centres), newcomers, and women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people fleeing violence, as well as health care services. This is an issue of protecting free expression, a crucial cornerstone of a free and fair democracy. For all of us, and particularly given the alarming suppression of rights and freedoms we are witnessing in the U.S., we urge you to remember your legal obligations to uphold Charter rights and freedoms and protect our democracy.

Signed,

Jin Huh, Executive Director, Social Planning Toronto

Michelle Dagnino, Executive Director, Jane Finch Community and Family Centre

Keddone Dias, Executive Director, LAMP Community Health Centre

Bonnie Hunter, Executive Director, North York Community House

Pamela Uppal-Sandhu, Interim Co-Executive Director & Director of Policy, Ontario Nonprofit Network

Bill Sinclair, Executive Director, The Neighbourhood Group Community Services

Sree Nallomothu & Rob Howarth, Co-Executive Directors, Toronto Neighbourhood Centres

Jehad Aliweiwi, Executive Director, Laidlaw Foundation

Maritza Sanchez, Executive Director, Red Door Family Shelter

Saman Tabasinejad, Executive Director, Progress Toronto

Cameron Watts, Minister, Fairlawn Avenue United Church

Nasima Akter, Executive Director, Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services

Heather McGregor, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Toronto

Christie McQuarrie, Executive Director, West Scarborough Community Legal Services

Elene Lam & Soyoung Lee, Co-Executive Directors, Butterfly Asian and Migrant Sex Worker Support Network

Chiara Padovani, Co-Chair, York South-Weston Tenant Union

Maria Christina Conlon, Community Minister, Davenport Perth Community Ministry

Andrea Vásquez Jiménez, Director & Principal Consultant, Policing-Free Schools

Nas Yadollahi, President, CUPE Local 79

Fred Hahn, President, CUPE Ontario

Lidia Monaco, CEO, Operation Springboard

Chris Brillinger, Executive Director, Family Service Toronto

Alejandra Ruiz-Vargas, Marva Burnett, Rama Fayaz, Marcia Stone, Jacquie Mitchell, & Monique Gordon, Board Members, Toronto ACORN

Reverend Canon Maggie Helwig, Rector, Church of St Stephen-in-the-Fields

Andrew Pulsifer, Executive Director, TTCriders

Sultana Jahangir, Executive Director, South Asian Women's & Immigrants Services

Ahmed Hussein, CEO, TNO - The Neighbourhood Group

John Stapleton, Policy Analyst, Open Policy

Brandon Haynes, President, Toronto Public Library Workers Union - Local 4948 (CUPE)

Guled Arale, Program Coordinator, Scarborough Civic Action Network

Patti Pettigrew, Executive Director, Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society

Jennifer Chambers, Executive Director, Empowerment Council

Dawn Sutherland, Executive Director, Anduhyaun Inc.

Lee Soda, Executive Director, ACSA Community Services

Sahar, Vermezyari, Director, East Scarborough Storefront - MakeWay Charitable Society

Harmy Mendoza, Executive Director, WomanACT

Hunain Sindhu, President, Scarborough Campus Students Union (SCSU)

Trevor Manson, Co-Chair, ODSP Action Coalition

Paul Shepherd, Minister, Chapel in the Park United Church

Debbie Douglas, Executive Director, OCASI - Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

Rev'd Canon Andrea Budgey, Priest-in-charge, Saint Theodore of Canterbury

Donna Spreitzer, Executive Director, Toronto Community for Better Child Care

Bill Worrell, Board Chairperson, Oakwood Vaughan Community Organization

Asif Khan, Research and Policy Analyst, Income Security Advocacy Centre

Elin Goulden, Social Justice & Advocacy Consultant, Anglican Diocese of Toronto

Rene Adams, Member CLELN-Canadian Lived Experience Leadership Network

Adolpho West, Senior Policy Advisor, Centre for Lasting Solutions

Matt Johnstone, Executive Director, FoodShare Toronto

Rejwan Karim, Acting Associate Executive Director, Access Alliance MHCS

Eleanor Yang, Executive Director, Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter

Kemi Jacobs, Executive Director, Delta Family Resource Centre

Nasseradin Abdullah, Executive Director, Wadi Kaja Organization for Refugees and Immigrants

Mulugeta Abai, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Torture Victims

Dr. Sudip Minhas, Executive Director, Settlement Assistance & Family Support Services (SAFSS)

Vanda Henriques, Executive Director, Working Women Community Centre

Kelly Potvin, Executive Director, Elizabeth Fry Toronto

Christopher Nkambwe, Executive Director, The African Centre for Refugees in Ontario-Canada

Marina Nikova, Executive Director, Working Skills Centre

Tsering Lhamo, Co-Executive Director, FCJ Refugee Centre

Aasiya Hussain, Executive Director & CEO, Ecohesian

Aadil Nathani, Co-Founder, Green Ummah

Tabassum Wyne, Executive Director, Muslim Advisory Council of Canada

Taha Ghayyur, Executive Director, Justice For All Canada

Dada Gasirabo, Executive Director, Oasis Centre des femmes

Brad Evoy, Executive Director, Disability Justice Network of Ontario

Sid Jackson, Member, Voices 4 Unhoused Liberation

Calum Houston, Community Organizer, Harm Reduction Advocacy Collective (HAC)