



Harper Jean Tobin
Director, Community Resilience Project
hjtobin@the519.org

Executive Committee
Toronto City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

December 9, 2025

RE: EX28.4 - Strengthening the City's Heat Relief Strategy

I am pleased to submit these comments on behalf of The 519 Church Street Community Centre. We appreciate the Committee's attention to the urgent and rising climate crisis and the need for comprehensive responses to extreme heat.

We thank the staff of Toronto Emergency Management, Toronto Public Health (TPH), and other City partners for their work to develop these reports, recommendations, and to update the Heat Relief Strategy. As a City of Toronto Agency and a member of the Association of Community Centres (AOCCs), and as a centre serving communities disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, we are eager to work with our City partners to advance these goals and plans.

We have made separate submissions on Items EX28.3 and EX28.5. We also take note of the closely related reports and recommendations presented at the December 4 Infrastructure and Environment Committee meeting on the Net Zero Action Plan 2026-2030, and submitted separate comments on that report.

Comprehensive responses to extreme heat are essential for all communities in the City, and especially for the Downtown East and 2SLGBTQ+ communities The 519 serves.

As explained further in our submission on Item EX.28.3, addressing extreme heat is important to The 519 because we serve nearly every community identified in City strategies and existing research as facing heightened heat exposure and vulnerability, including: 2SLGBTQ+ people; Newcomers; unhoused and insecurely-housed people, older adults; families with young children; people with mental illness; drug users; sex workers; and Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities.

The 519's catchment area, historically centered around the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood, expanded in 2024 to take in much of the Downtown East. As University of Toronto researchers have shown, our catchment area is among those areas of the city with the highest vulnerability to extreme heat.¹ The new *Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability Assessment* provides additional illustrations showing the Downtown East's elevated heat vulnerability.²

The 519 also serves 2SLGBTQ+ people across the city, a population that is more exposed to, and more at risk from, extreme heat. The 519 summarized the growing evidence of these disparities in

¹ Bu S. et al., *Mapping Heat Vulnerability in Toronto*, Univ. of Toronto School of Cities (Aug. 6, 2024), <https://schoolofcities.github.io/heat-vulnerability-toronto/>.

² Sustainability Solutions Group, *Toronto's Climate Risks: Understanding Vulnerability Today, Preparing for Tomorrow: Summary Report*, Figures 7, 10-11 (Nov. 2025), <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-260483.pdf>.

our 2024 report *Framing Queer Resilience and Climate Justice*.³ 2SLGBTQ+ are more exposed to unsafe indoor temperatures because they are more likely to be low-income renters.⁴ 2SLGBTQ+ people are also *more at risk from* extreme heat. This because 2SLGBTQ+ populations experience multiple disparities in health and social determinants of health, “driven by social forces, such as stigma, prejudice, and discrimination,” that can increase their risk exposure during extreme heat.⁵

Escalating heat risks demand increased investments in the reach, efficacy, and evaluation of the City’s Heat Relief Strategy.

We appreciate and support the steps described in TEM’s report to strengthen Toronto’s Heat Relief Strategy for 2026, including continued investments in street outreach, water distribution, extended pool hours, cooling spaces, public communication. However, we suggest there is a disjuncture between the picture of escalating risk from extreme heat described in that report and the flat budget (technically a slight decrease) and limited expansion of efforts proposed. While we appreciate the efforts described in the report to increase investments and responsiveness in 2025, current data on the City’s heat vulnerability does not suggest these efforts represent a fully sufficient baseline to maintain, but rather that existing needs remain greater and will continue to increase. (It’s notable in this regard that TEM’s report recognizes risks related to a potential heat wave during “an existing strain on City services, as anticipated during the summer 2026 period due to the FIFA World Cup.”⁶) We urge TEM and other City partners, with the support of Council, to **work to step up these investments in 2026 and future years commensurate with increasing risks and needs—particularly with regard to proactive, face-to-face outreach.**

We appreciate and support plans to strengthen operational preparedness measures, communications, and evaluation across City divisions. We particularly appreciate the focus on data collection, evaluation, and future planning, including through developing evaluation models and metrics across divisions; evaluating the planned 24-hour cooling space; reviewing additional outreach strategies; and identifying sites for future pilot interventions. We particularly see potential in expanding investment in door-to-door check-ins. We encourage TEM, TPH, and other Divisions to provide, and Council to direct, **additional reporting on the progress of these data, research, evaluation, and planning efforts ahead of summer 2026.** We further urge you to ensure that these efforts include a strong focus on measuring and supporting what works to prevent heat-related morbidity and mortality.

As an active member of the Downtown East Community Coordination Plan Cluster, The 519 strongly supports the Social Development Division’s plans to work with CCP clusters on resilience planning, and hopes to be an active and leading participant in this work in the DTE Cluster. We urge

³ The 519, *Framing Queer Resilience and Climate Justice: Exploring Approaches to 2SLGBTQ+ Resilience to Climate Change and Other Shocks and Stresses* (2024), <https://www.the519.org/climate-justice/>. See also Mann S., McKay T., Gonzales G., Climate Change-Related Disasters & the Health of LGBTQ+ Populations, *J. Clim. Chang. Health*, 18:100304 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2024.100304>.

⁴ Statistics Canada, Table 13-10-0874-01: Socioeconomic characteristics of the 2SLGBTQ+ population, 2019 to 2021 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.25318/1310087401-eng>; Statistics Canada, Housing experiences in Canada: LGBTQ2+ people in 2018 (2021), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/46-28-0001/2021001/article/00004-eng.htm>.

⁵ Nat’l Acad. Sci., Engineer., & Med., *Understanding the Well-Being of LGBTQI+ Populations* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.17226/25877>. See also Kinitz D.J. et al., Health of 2SLGBT people experiencing poverty in Canada: a review, *Health Promotion Int’l* 37:daab057 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daab057> (“Discrimination was an overarching finding that explained persistent associations between 2SLGBTQ+ status, poverty and health”).

⁶ Report of the Executive Director, Toronto Emergency Management, “Strengthening the City’s Heat Relief Strategy,” p. 18 (Nov. 25, 2025), <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2025/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-260580.pdf>.



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Social Development, with the support of Council, to **work to provide or leverage resources that can allow cluster organizations to devote significant time and effort to this planning work, and enable them to make significant commitments to resource-sharing and coordinated responses during heat emergencies.**

Additionally, we urge TEM, TPH, Social Development, and other City Partners, with the support of Council, to invest in:

- Greater **support for, and stronger two-way communication channels with, resident leaders and grassroots networks** to plan for and respond to extreme heat.
- Efforts to **track and report heat-related deaths and hospitalizations** at the municipal, as well as regional or provincial, levels.
- Expanding **investments in emergency shelter access and in social, supportive and deeply affordable housing** from all levels of government, which are essential to address homelessness and housing insecurity as underlying drivers of heat morbidity and mortality.

We look forward to continued dialogue and collaboration with TEM, TPH, and our other City partners to improve our responses to the City's escalating heat risks.

Conclusion.

We reiterate our appreciation of the efforts of ECF, ML&S, TPH, this Committee, and our other City partners to advance plans for the next phases of action to meet the City's commitments to climate resilience and to protect residents from life-threatening heat. We look forward to working with you, together with other AOCCs and community partners, to advance the transformational actions needed to preserve the lives, health, resilience of Toronto's residents in the critical years ahead.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Harper Jean Tobin
Director, Community Resilience Project