

RE: PH23.3 - Advancing Six Sites for the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS)**15 July 2025**

Dear Councillor Perks and Members of the Planning and Housing Committee,

I write to you as a Toronto Resident who has lived and worked in many of the wards referenced in this report before you today. I serve as the Executive Director of Disability Justice Network of Ontario and as a co-Chair of the national Accessible Housing Network. In all these capacities, I wish to convey my support to advance six sites as part of the Homelessness Services Capital Infrastructure Strategy (HSCIS). We support the zoning changes contained within, but this is much bigger than a zoning issue.

As is our longstanding position, however, I must reiterate: emergency shelters are not housing. There must be a continued focus from the City to ensure that building *actually* affordable, *actually* accessible housing is the end goal of our work. It is my hope that this infrastructure can be eventually transitioned to permanent housing for disabled, unhoused residents through a cooperative model. That said, members of disabled communities in Toronto need action now—therefore, we need to ensure that shelter spaces reflect the needs of these same communities.

Before we can begin discussing the nature of these shelters, however, I must urge you to ignore reactionary voices that aim to hamper progress in this City and aim to undermine the fundamental rights of unhoused, disabled Torontonians to housing. We cannot put the comfort and property values of some business and home owners above the fundamental rights of all people to be housed. It is as simple as that.

Every review and data point—from those of the Federal Housing Advocate to the 2024 Street Needs Assessment here in Toronto—echo the reality that community organizers, agency staff, and unhoused people are conveying to you all today in this (and much previous) correspondence, that:

- Unhoused disabled people need shelter, and ultimately permanent housing, now.
- Unhoused disabled and abled people all speak to the unaffordability of this City and how this City must act to make up for Provincial and wider policy failures, like the lack of clear rent control, improved social assistance, and so on.
- The number of Torontoians who are unhoused, underhoused, or otherwise precariously housed continues to grow consistently.
- There are clear factors, including increased costs for health and home care, that push even further on unhoused disabled people.

Unlike those in this City who prioritize their supposed financial position over our rights, it is our position that disabled people need to thrive in our communities wherever we are. We have lived through decades of the Provincial Asylum System, of long-term care isolation, of institutions that separate disabled peoples from our communities. Such conditions cannot be replicated again when it comes to shelter spaces. These shelters must be located in these wards and must be integrated into these communities. Disabled people cannot be shuffled to the margins and away from community connections at any time, let alone when we most need support. Ableist landowning residents and other neighbours simply should not have the last word on this issue—our disabled, unhoused neighbours also deserve to be part of and remain in our communities.

Further, such spaces must:

- integrate support around harm reduction;
- operate with low barriers/regulations for community members to become residents;
- engage meaningfully residents to control their own living spaces; and,
- offer culturally appropriate access and living space.

Restrictive, culturally inappropriate, isolated, and inaccessible shelters fail us—only harming both disabled individuals and the whole community.

Relatedly, we also know that the population of unhoused disabled people on social assistance programs alone is skyrocketing. We would hope that you would take this moment to also advance political pressure on the Province to massively increase the housing allowance portion of our social assistance systems and further the demand for [full rent control](#).

Finally, to support disabled residents in the shelter system, the City must implement a variant of the Accessible Housing Working Group (AHWG)'s [Guidelines on Increasing the City's Supply of Accessible Affordable Housing](#) in shelter settings as well. As we have said before, a variant of these guidelines are needed as they must be developed further through direct and clear community leadership by unhoused disabled people—as there can be “nothing about us, without us”.

To conclude, we know that the City of Toronto has the tools, resources, and ample voices of lived experience from our disabled communities to make the right choices here. It is not the time to retreat from real action and defend the rights of communities across Toronto. The voices of those who would pressure otherwise do not reflect those most impacted by these decisions. Any retreat from building shelters in these wards—especially if built correctly to transition into truly accessible, permanent housing in the long-term—is a betrayal of Toronto residents.

This must be a city for all of us, not just the richest and most comfortable among us.

We hope that you will center those most impacted and take action to further these shelters. Listen well today and allow unhoused, disabled Torontonians to lead towards a better housing and emergency shelter system. Any future plans for this system must be led by and for unhoused disabled and disabled people from city strategic plans to implementation and governance once these spaces are operating.

With sincerest respect,



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*Building a **world** where disabled people are free to be.*