



June 7, 2026

To: Economic and Community Development Committee / City Clerk
Re: The AIDS Memorial, Echoes, and Item 2026.EC29.12

Dear Councillor Bravo and Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee,

On behalf of the Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance (GMSH), I am writing to express our support for the Echoes proposal and to urge the Committee to consider the future of The AIDS Memorial independently from discussions regarding fencing or nighttime closure of Barbara Hall Park.

GMSH is a provincial alliance that works to improve the sexual health and wellbeing of gay, bi, queer, Two-Spirit, trans, and other men who have sex with men across Ontario. Through partnerships with more than 30 organizations, GMSH supports a coordinated response to HIV, sexual health, stigma reduction, and community wellbeing in communities across the province.

From that provincial perspective, we can say clearly that The AIDS Memorial is not simply a local park feature or neighbourhood amenity. It is one of the most important sites of HIV remembrance in Ontario and among the most significant places of HIV memory in Canada.

For many people affected by HIV, particularly gay, bi, queer, and other men who have sex with men, The AIDS Memorial is sacred ground. It is a place where friends, lovers, mentors, activists, caregivers, and community leaders are remembered. It is a place where grief is given public recognition. It is a place where people living with HIV can see their history reflected and their experiences acknowledged.

For many people across Ontario, visiting The AIDS Memorial is an act of pilgrimage. Whether travelling from Northern Ontario, Eastern Ontario, Southwestern Ontario, or smaller communities where visible HIV history is often absent, people come to Toronto and seek out the memorial as a place of connection, reflection, remembrance, and learning. Its significance extends far beyond Barbara Hall Park and far beyond the boundaries of any single ward.

That is why we are concerned that The AIDS Memorial and the Echoes proposal have become attached to a debate framed primarily through concerns about public safety, disorder, and enforcement.

The AIDS Memorial deserves to be considered on its own terms.

For decades, communities affected by HIV have been subjected to narratives that portrayed them as dangerous, undesirable, disruptive, or disposable. Many of the people whose names are remembered at The AIDS Memorial lived through periods when indifference, stigma, and exclusion shaped public responses to their lives and deaths.



Today, many of the people who use Barbara Hall Park—including unhoused people, people who use drugs, people experiencing mental health challenges, and others living at the margins—continue to face similar forms of social exclusion and public judgment.

These histories are not identical, but they remind us that public conversations about who belongs in shared spaces, whose presence is valued, and whose needs are treated as inconvenient have profound consequences.

The AIDS Memorial should not be situated within a civic framework that emphasizes nuisance, disorder, or removal. It should be understood as a place of memory, dignity, compassion, and community. Its purpose is not to separate people from one another, but to bear witness to lives that too often went unseen or unvalued.

For these reasons, GMSH supports the creation of a separate process through which The AIDS Memorial and the Echoes proposal can be considered on their own merits and in consultation with the communities most affected by HIV.

We also support Echoes as a thoughtful and community-driven vision for the future of The AIDS Memorial. Echoes creates an opportunity to ensure that the memorial continues to honour those lost to AIDS while also reflecting the realities of HIV today, including the experiences of people living with HIV, the diversity of affected communities, and the ongoing work of remembrance, education, and collective care.

Finally, we encourage the City of Toronto to recognize the broader significance of The AIDS Memorial. While it is located in Toronto, its meaning extends across Ontario and beyond. For many communities served through GMSH's provincial network, it is a place of profound cultural, historical, and emotional importance. It functions not only as a local memorial, but as a provincial—and arguably national—site of remembrance.

We respectfully urge the Committee to support a separate consideration of The AIDS Memorial and Echoes, to allow this important work to proceed free from debates regarding park closure and enforcement, and to ensure that one of Ontario's most significant sites of HIV remembrance is treated with the dignity and care it deserves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gilles Charette".

Gilles Charette
Director, Gay Me's Sexual Health Alliance (GMSH)