



From: Shelter & Housing Justice Network  
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December 4, 2020

To:

Mayor John Tory

Members of Toronto City Council

Mary Ann-Bedard General Manager of Shelter Support & Housing Administration

Janie Romoff, General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation Department

CC: Encampment Support Network

The Shelter and Housing Justice Network (SHJN) is a collective of homelessness and housing advocates, shelter providers, healthcare professionals, faith leaders, legal workers, and researchers.

We are writing in support of the people who are currently living in encampments throughout the City.

Currently, Toronto is losing affordable housing faster than it is being built<sup>1</sup> and tens of thousands of people risk eviction.<sup>2</sup> Encampments are a result of housing policy failure and policies of deprivation and eviction do nothing to address this ongoing policy failure.

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<sup>1</sup> Goldstein, M., & Dwelling Room Preservation Policy Working Group. (2020). *Fixing the Leaky Bucket: A Comprehensive Policy & Program Framework to Preserve Toronto's Supply of Deeply Affordable Housing*. [http://www.pnlt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Fixing-The-Leaky-Bucket\\_Full-Report\\_V1.pdf](http://www.pnlt.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Fixing-The-Leaky-Bucket_Full-Report_V1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Toronto Foundation. (2020). *The Toronto Fall Out Report: Half A Year in the Life of COVID-19*. <https://torontofoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Toronto-Fallout-Report-2020.pdf>

Mayor Tory: you made (inadequate and insufficient) commitments to “taking concrete actions that will improve the day-to-day lives of Indigenous, Black and other marginalized Torontonians” in June.<sup>3</sup> Residents of the encampments are disproportionately Indigenous, Black and racialized people. The dispossession of Indigenous people from Indigenous land is an act of colonial violence.<sup>4</sup> Evicting homeless people from public space further criminalizes this already over-criminalized population. Several encampment residents have publicly spoken about the negative impact that the City’s criminalization of their lives is having on them.<sup>5</sup>

Evictions also dislocate people from their communities, including their supports and safety networks. Providing TTC tokens for pre-scheduled appointments - sometimes 90 minutes away or more - is not an acceptable solution. Only an eviction moratorium and more downtown shelter-hotel spaces can help ensure people can remain attached to their communities.

Many of the encampment residents are concerned about the safety of shelters during the COVID-19 pandemic. Toronto is currently in “lockdown” and housed people are told by Toronto Public Health to avoid congregate settings, not have visitors in our home and not meet in groups larger than 10 outdoors.<sup>6</sup> Yet people residing in encampments are told to go into congregate settings with large numbers of people and that this is safe. There have been 660 cases of COVID-19 in the shelter system<sup>7</sup> but there are no known cases in the encampments.<sup>8</sup> There is also new evidence that the City’s existing social distancing strategy of 2m<sup>9</sup> within the shelter system is insufficient.<sup>10</sup> Given the choice between COVID-19 and the cold, some people encampment residents have

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<sup>3</sup> Tory, J. (2020, June 23). *CC22.2 Changes to Policing in Toronto: Report from Mayor John Tory*. City of Toronto. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilAgendaReport&meetingId=18760>

<sup>4</sup> Also see: Also see Farha and Schwan, 2020. *A National Protocol for Homeless Encampments in Canada* <https://www.make-the-shift.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/A-National-Protocol-for-Homeless-Encampments-in-Canada.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> November 8, 2020. Encampment Support Network Press Conference. Toronto; Pabani, A., & Rotsztain, D. (2020). *Dismantling Stubborn Structures*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bE54h6TTYf0&feature=youtu.be>

<sup>6</sup> City of Toronto. (2020, December 4). *COVID-19: Lockdown Guide for Toronto Residents*. <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-reopening-recovery-rebuild/covid-19-guide-for-toronto-residents/>

<sup>7</sup> City of Toronto. (2020). *Active COVID-19 Outbreaks in Toronto Shelters, December 2, 2020*. <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/8b49-Toronto-Active-Shelter-Outbreaks-December-2-2020.xlsx>

<sup>8</sup> According to encampment residents, multiple front line workers who are engaged in COVID testing in encampments.

<sup>9</sup> The City had to be taken to court to have this implemented: *Sanctuary et al v. Toronto (City) et al.*, 2020 ONSC 6207.

<sup>10</sup> Boisvert, N. (2020, December 2). Shared dorms in Toronto shelters put users at risk of airborne COVID-19 transmission, critics warn. *CBC News*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-homeless-shelters-airborne-risk-1.5823896>

weighed their options and chosen the cold. The City has an ethical duty to help mitigate the potential harms from the elements and fire risk by supplying survival supplies and fire safety information.<sup>11</sup>

We, therefore, call on the City of Toronto to:

1. Implement an immediate moratorium on forced evictions of encampment residents and temporary shelters from public spaces.
2. Open at least 2,000 new shelter-hotel rooms in the next 4 months. This is the only way people will have a safe alternative to living outside in encampments, given that shelters are currently full. For these sites to be successful and truly safe for people:
  - All sites must have overdose prevention services and support on-site that is provided by experienced harm-reduction staff.
  - Half of the sites must be located in the downtown core, to ensure people aren't disconnected from critical services and their communities.
3. Provide services to people in encampments.
  - Provide \$1 million to community agencies to distribute survival supplies and fire safety equipment to encamped individuals.
  - Ensure people have access to indoor facilities twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week – including access to winterized bathrooms and showers for encampments adjacent to City sites.
4. Build 10,000 units of rent-geared-to-income housing to be built in the next 3 years.

We recognize that all levels of government have an important role to play in housing policy. It is, however, unacceptable to continue to pass the buck to the province and the federal government. You have the power pass these four motions at City Council and to take emergency action to implement an interim moratorium on all encampment evictions of people and shelters today.

Survival supplies not evictions!

Sincerely,  
Shelter & Housing Justice Network

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<sup>11</sup> Coroner, O. of the C. (2018). *OCC Inquest Faulkner 2018: Verdict of Coroner's Jury*. <https://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/DeathInvestigations/Inquests/Verdictsandrecommendations/OCInquestFaulkner2018.html>