



COALITION FOR JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATES LEGAL ACTION AGAINST CITY OF EDMONTON FOR VIOLATING ENCAMPMENT RESIDENTS' RIGHTS

Edmonton, Alberta – August 30, 2023 – On Monday, August 28, 2023, the [Coalition for Justice and Human Rights \(CJHR\)](#) initiated legal action against the City of Edmonton in response to the harm arising from the ongoing eviction and displacement of individuals residing in encampments. Despite being aware of the inadequacies in housing and shelter provisions to address the needs of all Edmontonians, the City of Edmonton continues to displace encampments with no reasonable solution. These actions have placed vulnerable people in dangerous situations, thereby violating the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and undermining their fundamental human rights. The City of Edmonton has until end of day Monday, September 18, 2023 to file its Statement of Defence.

According to Homeward Trust Edmonton's [By-Name List](#), as of August 2023 there are 3,137 unhoused individuals in the city, 1,380 of whom lack provisional accommodations each night and who stay in emergency shelters or outside. The City knows that the numbers of people who stay outside may be undercounts, given the difficulties associated with counting such people. So, there are likely more than 1,380 people who need emergency shelter in Edmonton, yet as of August 2023 there are only 843 shelter beds in Edmonton. From November 2021 until present, the number of shelter beds has fluctuated between 614 and 1,218. Most or all of those shelter beds do not allow pets, accommodate families, offer adequate storage of personal property, or permit people to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Some people do not feel safe in shelters and, given the choice between staying outside and staying in a shelter where they feel unsafe, stay outside. For these reasons and more, the emergency shelter beds available in Edmonton are inadequate to meet unhoused peoples' needs.

Despite knowing this to be true, the City prohibits people from staying anywhere on City-owned land. The City of Edmonton's current approach to displacing and evicting encampment residents has inflicted profound harm, perhaps even death. According to the Edmonton Coalition for Housing and Homelessness, an astonishing 156 unhoused individuals tragically died in 2022, with an even more distressing toll of 222 deaths in 2021. Had the City of Edmonton and the Government of Alberta provided adequate emergency shelter during those years, and had the City not interfered with unhoused peoples' ability to care for and protect themselves and each other in encampments during those years, some of those tragic deaths may not have occurred.

“Due to the City's policy of displacing encampments, unhoused individuals have endured severe hardships. These include the loss of essential personal belongings like tents, propane tanks and propane-powered stoves, ID, and bikes; disruptions in crucial relationships and support systems that enable unhoused people to protect and care for themselves and each other; and an elevated risk of injury, and even death from exposure to extreme weather.” said Chris Wiebe, a lawyer from Engel Law Office who acts as co-counsel for CJHR. “Unhoused people have the same rights as anyone, which include rights to personal property and rights protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. This legal action aims to protect those rights and to stop or restrict the City’s harmful encampment displacement policy.”

CJHR will be represented by lawyers Chris Wiebe from Engel Law Office and Avnish Nanda of Nanda & Company. Law professor Dr. Anna Lund and lawyer DJ Janjua are providing research support for the litigation. CJHR will argue on behalf of unhoused people in Edmonton that the City of Edmonton’s encampment displacement policy breaches unhoused peoples’ right to freely assemble and associate; right to life, liberty and security of their persons; right against unreasonable seizure; right against cruel and unusual treatment; and right to equality, which are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

As we approach yet another winter of extreme temperatures, this lawsuit becomes a critical matter of life and death for unhoused individuals in Edmonton.

To remain informed about the lawsuit's progress and contribute to covering legal expenses, please visit nandalaw.ca/encampments.

- 30 -

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Coalition for Justice and Human Rights

Formally founded in 2017, Coalition for Justice and Human Rights began as a group of advocates and workers in non-profit organizations working together to address a growing need for community based advocacy support in Edmonton. The organization exists to support the most marginalized in Edmonton and to help eliminate barriers to access to justice and advocacy.

Engel Law Office

Engel Law Office is a criminal defence and civil litigation firm that focuses on the protection and advancement of rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Nanda & Company

Nanda & Company is a boutique litigation firm with an emphasis on public interest matters and access to justice.