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Deputy Mayor and Chair Ana Bailao
Members of the Planning and Housing Committee

Dear Committee Members,

Declaring Toronto's Homelessness and Housing Crisis a State of Emergency

We are just a few weeks into 2019, and already four Toronto residents, who experienced homelessness, have lost their lives on our streets. A homeless Indigenous man died in an alley. Crystal Papineau died trapped in a clothing donation bin; she was also homeless. Hang Vo was crushed by a garbage truck, as she lay sleeping in a laneway. She was 58 years old and homeless. Another young homeless woman died of an overdose in a 24-hour respite facility.

Housing is a human right. Toronto's lack of deeply affordable housing, supportive and transitional housing, mental health services, and shelter overcapacity are resulted in deadly consequences. We are facing a homelessness crisis that requires a co-ordinated emergency intergovernmental human rights based response.

Frontline housing workers are reporting a dramatic new wave of homelessness and under housing. Tenants have reported that they are being displaced from their homes by so-called "renovictions" where landlords fueled by a 1.1% Toronto rental vacancy rate and all-time high rents, illegally evict their tenants under the claim that they are "renovating" the units and do not offer or honour any right of return. It is also reported that 6500 listings on the "home sharing" app, Airbnb, are listed in contradiction to Toronto's new short-term rental regulations (currently under appeal to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal).

In 2018, there are approximately 181,000 people on Toronto's Centralized Waiting List, managed by Access to Housing. Applications are chronologically added to the Centralized Waiting List by their date of application and clients are served on a first-come, first-served basis, and applicants with the older application dates receive an offer of housing first. An applicant can expect to wait: seven years or more for a bachelor unit, 12 years or more for a one-bedroom unit and 10 years or more for larger unit sizes.

Approximately 14,000 Toronto residents living with serious and persistent mental health challenges continue to wait for access to supportive housing, where the demand far outstrips supply. In a recent two-year period, over 4,000 new people applied while less than 600 were placed in supportive housing. Most applicants have long wait times. Nearly 60 percent (4,431) of applicants on the administrative database and waitlist of The Access Point, the coordinated access system for supportive housing in Toronto, had been waiting for housing for two or more years and those waiting longest (top 10% on the waitlist) had been waiting 4.5 years or longer.

Toronto's housing crisis is so dire, that disaster relief structures being put into use are not enough and we require an emergency response from all levels of government. The City has the capacity to shelter over 7,000 people, and yet we are far from meeting the need. Toronto Public Health recorded 145 deaths of individuals experiencing homelessness, from January 1, 2017 to June 30th 2018. It is time to declare homelessness a crisis and bring all available emergency housing resources to bear, to preserve the sanctity of human life, and prevent further suffering.

The Province of Ontario Emergency Response Plan defines an emergency as "... a situation, or impending situation that constitutes a danger of major proportions that could result in serious harm to persons or substantial damage to property or other health risk". It goes on to say that "These situations could threaten public safety, public health, the environment, property, critical infrastructure and economic stability". It is clear to us that Toronto's situation meets several of these criteria.

The Government of Canada's Emergency Management Act states that "A government institution may not respond to a provincial emergency unless the government of the province requests assistance or there is an agreement with the province that requires or permits the assistance".

It is imperative that we, as a Municipal government, declare that homelessness is a humanitarian crisis, which we do not possess the resources to manage alone in Toronto. We must call on the Provincial government to assist us. The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services is tasked with this response, under the Emergency Response and Civil Protection Act. Should the Province also find itself without the resources to adequately contain the crisis, a Provincial Emergency should be declared so that the resources of the Federal Government may be brought to bear.

Recommendations:

1. City Council affirm its commitment to complying with its obligations under International Human Rights Law to take all appropriate measures to homelessness as a human rights crisis.
2. City Council declare homelessness a human rights disaster akin to a Municipal Emergency or a national emergency and an urgent human rights crisis, and seek assistance from the Province under the Emergency Response and Civil Protection Act.
3. City Council request the Provincial government to apply to the Federal Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and alert the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and his Parliamentary Secretary, to seek the establishment of an intergovernmental table with participation of those affected and their representatives tasked with addressing the housing and homelessness crisis in Toronto, and in any other similarly affected municipalities throughout Ontario.

4. City Council convene an emergency meeting with representatives of the federal government including the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister, the Provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and persons who are homeless and precariously housed in Toronto and their representatives to develop an urgent plan of action.

5. City Council request the Office of Emergency Management take immediate steps to augment services for homeless individuals and seek the support of the Red Cross in managing the harm inflicted by the housing and homelessness crisis.

Respectfully submitted,



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