

Dear Mayor Tory, City Councillors, Ms. Bedard and Mr. Tanner,

We are writing to express our concern with the City's recent actions in attempting to clear the encampment at Lamport Stadium on May 19, 2021. The forcible displacement of unhoused people by police officers (some of them mounted) and hired corporate security guards, and the imposition of charges or fines of up to \$10,000, violates human rights, contributes to the criminalization of homeless people, and deeply impairs trust between the City's officials and its most vulnerable residents.

Throughout this pandemic, we have advocated for the City to take a flexible, harm-reduction approach toward unhoused people living in encampments, working *with* encampment residents to secure appropriate shelter options, rather than clearing encampments without the consent of the persons encamped. We have taken this stance, recognizing that there are varied and valid reasons why individuals living in encampments may not find a congregate shelter or even a private room in a shelter hotel adequate and appropriate to their needs: fear of COVID-19 transmission, a wish to retain more than two bags' worth of personal belongings, frustration with curfews and other regulations experienced as demeaning, infantilizing, and triggering of past trauma (i.e. the residential school experience), and a desire to maintain relationships and connections to services in a particular neighbourhood, among other reasons. While there are certainly health and safety risks associated with living in encampments, "forcibly displacing people from encampments does not lead to improved health outcomes in many instances", as Jason Altenberg of South Riverside Community Health Centre has pointed out. This is particularly true when people are dispersed into new, less visible, encampments, suffer trauma from the experience of displacement, or are removed from the supports they have within the encampment community.

People without homes are not people without rights. Toronto's own Housing Charter, adopted in 2017, provides that "all residents should be able to live in their neighbourhood of choice without discrimination;" that "all residents, regardless of whether they rent or own a home, or are homeless, have an equal stake and voice in Toronto's future"; and that "all residents have the right to equal treatment in housing without discrimination as provided by the Ontario Human Rights Code, and to be protected from discriminatory practices which limit their housing opportunities." Forcible clearing of encampments violates these rights. Residents of Toronto who are homeless still have the right to be treated with respect and dignity, and offered meaningful choice and collaboration in decisions and actions that affect them personally.

It is frequently pointed out that City bylaws prohibit camping in parks. With respect, appealing to this bylaw resembles nothing so much as Anatole France's famous dictum that, "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges." People living in encampments are *not* engaged in camping as a leisure activity. They are trying to survive a global pandemic in one of the most unaffordable cities in North America, in a city which has allowed housing costs to soar while historically lagging in the creation and maintenance of affordable housing. Criminalizing homeless people for their attempts to survive is an example of law enforcement that may treat housed and unhoused people "equally" but falls far short of equity.

We recognize that the City of Toronto is not solely to blame for Toronto's housing gap; lack of adequate federal and provincial funding has compounded the problem. We also commend the City for its rapid creation of new supportive housing units in multiple sites. Anglicans across Toronto are involved in supporting these new sites in their neighbourhoods through speaking up at neighbourhood meetings,

involvement in community liaison committees, and other efforts to make the residents welcome in their new neighbourhoods. We are your partners in promoting affordable housing and working against NIMBYism, so that we can build communities of hope and compassion within this city.

Rapid modular housing is only one way in which the City can work to create affordable housing in Toronto. Another way is through the adoption of a robust inclusionary zoning policy that would set aside between 20-30% of all new residential developments with 60 or more units for permanently affordable housing. We urge the City to pursue these and all possible avenues to resolving the crises in housing affordability and homelessness that have been growing for decades, and whose seriousness has been revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recognize that homeless encampments in City Parks are not desirable in the long term, and that resolving the complex issues for encampment residents is not a quick fix. However, we deplore the recent events at Lamport Stadium. We urge the City not to repeat this heavy-handed action, but rather to focus its efforts on rebuilding trust with unhoused people and on working collaboratively with them and those who support and advocate for them in finding permanent housing solutions.

Yours faithfully,

Elin Goulden, Social Justice & Advocacy Consultant, Diocese of Toronto

The Rev. Maggie Helwig, Chair, Social Justice & Advocacy Committee, Diocese of Toronto

The Rev. Andrea Budgey, Chair, Poverty Reduction Subcommittee, Diocese of Toronto

Ms. Flo Cook, Chair, Housing Advocacy Subcommittee, Diocese of Toronto