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Attention Jessica R Orkin

Dear Ms. Orkin:

Mayor John Tory, Dr. Eileen de Villa, Mary-Anne Bedard and I wish to thank you for your letter of April 20, 2020. Your clients raise a number of very important concerns, many of which we share. We would like you to know that we take these issues very seriously and wish to provide our assurances that every decision we make is guided by our goal of keeping all of our residents healthy and safe.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in our City presents an unprecedented challenge to all of us, but that is particularly so for the City's most vulnerable populations. For people experiencing homelessness, the outbreak presents unique risks. We understand that certain solutions proposed for the general population are not necessarily workable for people without permanent housing. Shelter, Support & Housing Administration ("SSHA") is working tirelessly with Toronto Public Health, other City Divisions, provincial and federal governments and the community non-profit sector to tailor solutions for our homeless population as quickly and effectively as possible. We would like to share with you many of the actions that have and are being taken to that end.

Toronto has the largest shelter system in Canada. There are 75 shelter/respite sites ("Toronto shelters") that shelter more than 7,000 people every night, including the almost 3,000 people already sheltered in hotels/family settings. Of the 75 shelter sites located in Toronto, only 11 locations are operated by the City. The remaining 64 programs are operated by community non-profit agencies.

At the outset of this pandemic, SSHA conducted an impact assessment to determine the greatest areas of risk so that the City could prioritize its actions. This was done in conjunction with Toronto Public Health.

The initial objective of our response was prevention, with the goal of keeping COVID-19 out of our shelter system for as long as possible. This work included providing guidance, training and resources to all our service providers on Infection Prevention and Control measures required to protect staff and clients. It has also included providing personal protective equipment for frontline shelter workers and advocating to other levels of government for the provision of these critical supplies. We have extended operating hours in several of our shelters.

We are aware of the federal and provincial governments' respective Guidances regarding spacing of beds in shelter settings during the COVID-19 crises. We agree with these recommendations.

A critical component of our prevention work has been working closely with service providers to help them take steps to increase physical distancing measures on site, where possible, including reducing or eliminating the use of bunk beds. Many of our shelter sites have been able to meet the increased physical distancing guidelines of 2 metres referred to in your letter. However, given the varying sizes and layouts of Toronto shelters, creating adequate physical distancing at many of our sites has been a significant challenge.

Immediately imposing a mandatory standard requiring 2 metres of physical distancing between beds in all shelters was not workable given the space restrictions and number of residents that are served in Toronto shelters. Instead, where the City has been unable to ensure that a site is able to meet physical distancing guidelines, our focus has been on reducing the site's capacity and relocating people to other sites.

Relocating people out of shelters is an essential but complex task. Each resident has different needs and a number of steps are required before we can move someone to a new space. We first need to complete an individual assessment of each person to determine whether the individual is able to move and whether it is appropriate to do so. Where relocation is appropriate, we have to ensure that any location identified has undergone life safety inspections, and that the site has adequate amenities for residents. We also need to secure contracts for cleaning, catering, security and linen/laundry services. There are also issues surrounding the coordination of transportation to move people between sites and programs.

To facilitate this, the City has redeployed staff from other divisions to assist with this enormous effort. There are currently hundreds of redeployed staff being trained/working in our shelter system.

To date, we have opened 11 new facilities and secured more than 1200 hotel rooms. The City has also identified 15 additional locations for future use. To date 770 people have been moved to hotel rooms and 492 people to community space.

We are also working with Toronto Community Housing and other housing providers on a Rapid Housing Initiative, which has enabled people to move out of shelters and into permanent housing. More than 250 units have been identified for this initiative, 73 people have moved into new homes and others are being actively matched with housing.

The City has already moved over 1000 residents to new spaces. We expect to move another 1000 residents into new spaces by April 30, 2020. Our goal is to ensure that by the end of the month, all residents are housed in spaces that meet physical distancing guidelines. We are acutely aware of the urgency of implementing physical distancing guidelines in Toronto shelters and we are marshalling all resources available to us to implement this as soon as possible.

In addition to our relocation efforts, SSHA is making every effort to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 for shelter residents. We have strongly advocated to the provincial government that testing be prioritized for Toronto shelter clients so that we can respond quickly to new infections, and are working with healthcare partners to implement mobile on-site testing where recommended by Toronto Public Health. We have also provided isolation spaces to slow the transmission of the virus. We have one program for people who required travel related self-isolation to ensure they were not introducing the virus into the shelter system. We also opened an isolation program for

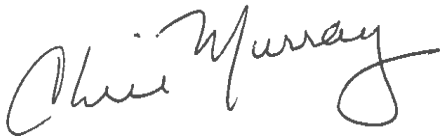
people waiting for test results so that people waiting for test results were not released back into the shelter system or onto the street.

Finally, the City has opened an interim 200-bed recovery facility for people experiencing homelessness who have tested positive for COVID-19 in partnership with Inner City Health Associates (ICHA) and other community health providers. We are working to prepare an additional expanded program to respond to anticipated increased demand for this service.

You have made specific reference to the Willowdale Welcome Centre. We advise that extensive testing has been carried out at that Centre. As a result we have and are continuing to work closely with Willowdale and TPH on a risk based response to the test results to address clients' specific needs that has included moving a number of residents to other locations.

The City's response to the outbreak of COVID-19 in our shelters is understandably a matter of public interest. Implementing a comprehensive and nimble response as quickly as practicable is the City's paramount goal. We are working very closely with Toronto Public Health to address the immediate needs of this vulnerable population but also to understand the trajectory of the virus so that we can plan for the future. As you can appreciate, this is an evolving situation and we expect further developments in the coming days. The City will continue to provide regular public updates on the Toronto shelter situation.

Yours truly,



Chris Murray
City Manager

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