

Hamilton calls on City to save the Wesley Day Centre and to fulfill its commitment to open a Consumption and Treatment Services site

Dear Mayor Eisenberger,

June 24, 2019

On June 12, 2019 Hamilton learned that the Wesley Day Centre, a two decades old community hub for people experiencing poverty and homelessness, would close its doors at the end of August. Wesley Community Homes, which owns the building at 195 Ferguson Ave N, has refused to renew the lease to Wesley Urban Ministries, which has run the center since its opening in 1996. This was first communicated to Wesley Urban Ministries when they showed interest in establishing a supervised injection site there in 2018.

As concerned Hamiltonians, users and providers of the many services offered under one roof at the Wesley Day Centre, we are calling on the City to intervene to ensure that the Day Centre can continue to provide its vital services to this marginalized population. Furthermore, because people accessing the Day Centre are disproportionately affected by addictions, we are also calling on the City to ensure that its intervention include plans for a permanent Consumption and Treatment Services site (CTS, otherwise known as a supervised injection site) offering comprehensive addiction treatment.

The Wesley Day Centre serves close to six hundred people a year, many of whom show up more than once a day. It serves two meals daily and hosts recreation programs, harm reduction and addiction services, housing support workers, case management and social engagement programming. The health clinic at the Day Centre houses the Public Health harm reduction team as well as the Shelter Health Network who provides comprehensive primary care as well as mental health and addictions care. The Centre is also a designated cooling station in the heat of the summer months and offers laundry and computer access for those who have none.

While there has been talk of continuation of services in different locations throughout the city, there is no substitute for having all the services in one location. The whole of the Wesley Day Centre is greater than the sum of its parts. The Centre provides low barrier, non-judgmental services in one location, meaning a person might go in for one reason (food) and come out with a completely different set of needs met (long overdue health care or a housing worker). The barriers to upward mobility faced by Hamilton's homeless are unimaginable and insurmountable to most. The all-in-one nature of drop in centres like this one helps people in ways that running from location to location for individual services simply cannot.

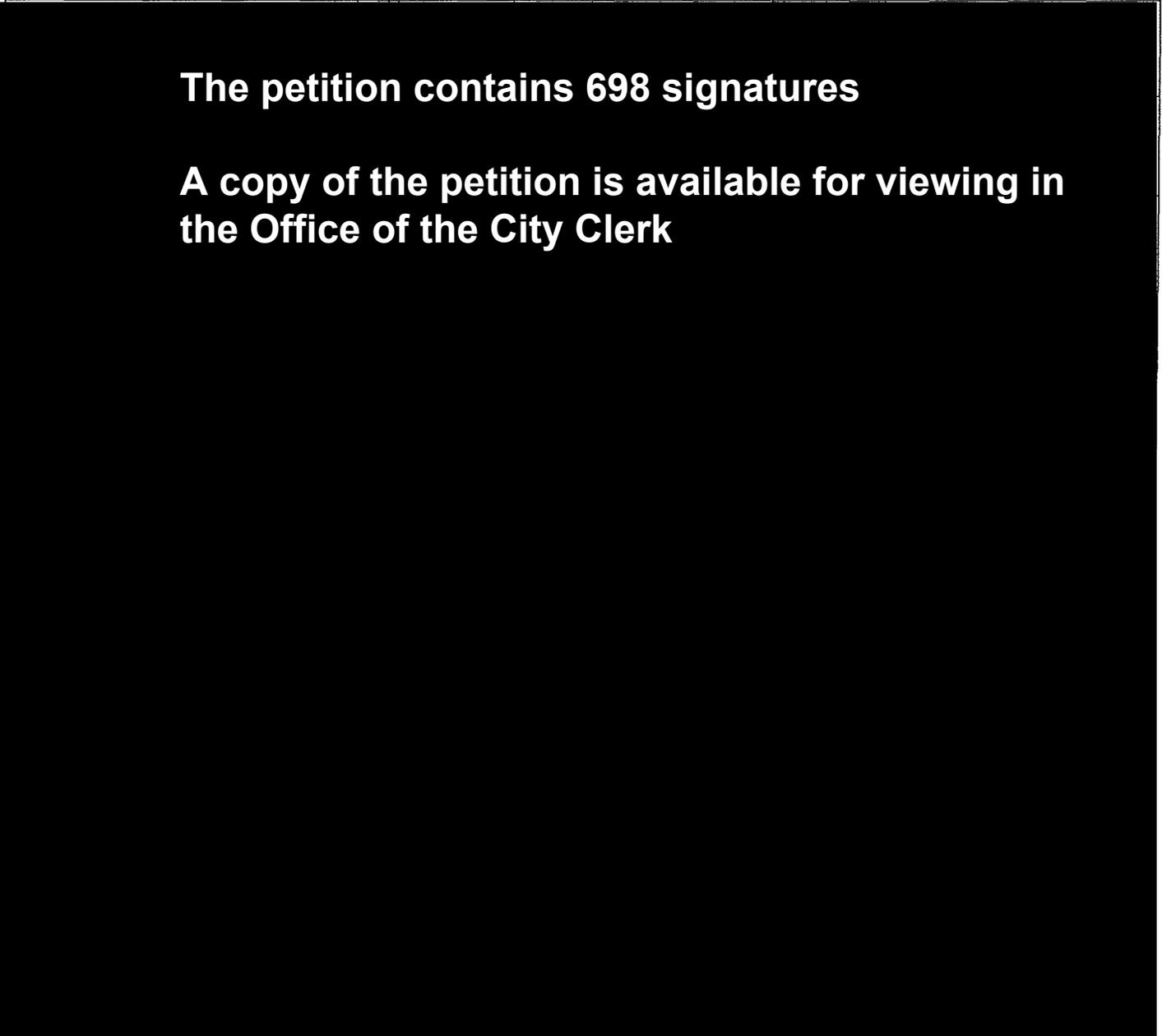
The dissolution of the Day Centre will doubtless wreak havoc on other already over-stretched community services. It will result in people who are constantly being told to move elsewhere having one less place to be. And it will sever links among people who use these services with the people who provide them – it will break down community at a time when we need to be building it up.

One cannot ignore the fact that this is happening at a time when Hamilton is experiencing a public health crisis unparalleled in recent history. More people are dying from the opioid crisis than ever before and people accessing services at the Wesley Day Centre are directly affected by this epidemic. The City has been outspoken in its commitment to provide a full service supervised injection site (Consumption and Treatment Services) yet despite the rhetoric, no such site has been established.

Hamilton has made a commitment to addressing poverty, homelessness and the opioid crisis, including multimillion-dollar Poverty Reduction and Drug Strategies. We are calling on the City of Hamilton to direct its commitment to addressing poverty and harm reduction by keeping this vital community service open and making good on its commitment to open a Consumption and Treatment Site with comprehensive addiction services. All of Hamilton will benefit when it does.

Sincerely,

Name	Designation	Organization
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The petition contains 698 signatures

A copy of the petition is available for viewing in the Office of the City Clerk