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Emergency & Community Services Committee
 c/o Fred Eisenberger, Mayor
 City of Hamilton
 71 Main St West
 Hamilton, ON L8P 4Y5

Dear Mayor Eisenberger and the Emergency & Community Services Committee:

RE: Preliminary Research Findings on Encampments in Hamilton

Thank you for the opportunity to present this written delegation with respect to the current issue of encampments in the city of Hamilton.

I am writing on behalf of a group of McMaster faculty members, researchers and medical students from the Faculties of Social Science and Health Sciences, led by Dr. Tim O'Shea and myself. Over the past several weeks we have been conducting a qualitative research project which aims to provide insight into the reasons why individuals choose to live in encampments in Hamilton, and what factors might make them more likely to voluntarily leave the encampment site. Our aim is to provide context to the current situation in order to move towards constructive solutions that are evidence-based and grounded in the needs of the individuals affected.

Thus far our team has conducted 16 interviews with people residing in the Ferguson St encampment. Our interview subjects are predominantly male (75%) with an average age of 36. Most describe being chronically homeless, and the majority of subjects report previous experience sleeping in encampments. Almost all subjects had experience with shelters in Hamilton, and various reasons were provided for not currently seeking a bed within a shelter. Several subjects report that they have been told that they are banned from shelter beds within the city.

The majority of subjects described their overall experience within the current encampment as being positive; availability of food, medical care and housing support workers were listed as the main benefits, as well as the ability to have a space that they could call their own within their tent. The most commonly reported negative aspect of the encampment was frequent theft.

Most respondents reported that they would not accept a shelter bed if offered, with various explanations provided. About half of the subjects reported that they would accept a room in a hotel if offered, particularly if it was in a central location close to the services which they require. All subjects reported that they would accept individual accommodation (ie an apartment or similar) if offered. When asked where they would go if the encampment was dismantled the majority responded that they would find another location to pitch a tent, or seek an abandoned building.

We are in the very preliminary stages of our qualitative analysis of the data we have collected. We present this information today as we feel it may help inform your current discussions. We look forward to presenting the results of our study to you as soon as they are available, likely in the next 3-5 weeks, and we are happy to answer further questions as they arise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James R. Dunn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "D".

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Director, McMaster Institute for Health Equity