

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Homeless Encampments - DO NOT DISMANTLE

From: **Yvgeniy Oparin**

Date: Wed, Jul 29, 2020 at 11:28 PM

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To: <jason.farr@hamilton.ca>

Cc: <hclc.cjch@gmail.com>, <info@keepingsix.org>, <info@hamsmart.ca>

Dear Councillor Farr,

I am writing to you today upon learning that the city of Hamilton is planning to imminently dismantle the homeless encampments along Ferguson Ave and First Ontario Centre. This is a targeted, harmful action against the homeless population in Hamilton and only serves to perpetuate further harm against an already extremely marginalized community. I urge you to think about what clearing these encampments will actually do and where the homeless community will go if the encampments are cleared.

As a resident physician working in Hamilton and having completed my medical school at McMaster as well, I am intimately familiar with the homeless population in Hamilton. As part of the medical curriculum, we learn about the importance of the social determinants of health (https://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/CMA_SDHC_infographic_v11.jpg). As a physician, I see these patients visit emergency rooms repeatedly for chronic diseases and social issues that cannot be fixed in a single visit. And to no fault of their own - the current healthcare and political systems do very little to help homeless people out of their circumstances. However, every day on my commute to and from the Hamilton General, I see community groups such as Keeping Six visiting the encampments - providing support, supplies, and referring them to other services that can help. This is the kind of help we need to provide, instead of sending away the Hamiltonians that need our help the most.

What does dismantling these encampments accomplish? Nothing. Who does this help? No one. These communities do not just disappear if they're cleared out. They will still remain homeless, just simply somewhere else. Especially in the context of the current pandemic, and without a plan for interim housing or social supports, this is no more than a targeted action against Hamilton's homeless community. At least in the current situation, advocacy and social support groups can visit the encampments and provide a variety of support services to the homeless population.

Therefore, I am calling on city council to take the following actions:

1. The City not dismantle homeless encampments
2. The City provide interim and permanent housing for encampment residents with necessary supports
3. The City prioritize individuals experiencing homelessness for urgent housing placement
4. The City engage encampment residents in assessing their needs prior to dismantling
5. The City remove barriers in shelters and hotels in order to accommodate the individual needs of encampment residents
6. The City allow for sanctioned encampment sites and/or designate specific parks/public lands where individuals are allowed to set up tents/temporary structures
7. The City allow for a streamlined, low-barrier, accessible process of issuing permits allowing for tents and temporary structures

Sincerely,
Dr. Yvgeniy Oparin