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Thursday, November 26, 2020.

Mayor Eisenberger and City Council,

On Monday, November 23, 2020 shortly after 12pm my friend and I were sitting together on the ledge on the outskirts of City Hall eating lunch and observing the Defund the Police Protest well over 30 feet away from other demonstrators. We were sitting there for approximately five minutes, when five by-law and police officers approached us and stated we were not wearing masks or following social distancing guidelines. We received a \$500 ticket for not maintaining two meters of distance under by-law No. 20-164 Section No. 2.1.

First, it is physically impossible to wear a mask while eating and we are not required to wear masks outside. Second, as per by-law No. 20-164 Section No. 2.1 “Every person shall maintain a distance of at least two (2) metres from every other person who is not a member of the same household or who is not a member of their Social Circle.” The person I was with was within my social circle. By-law officers and police did not gather any facts before aggressive enforcement was taken. Their actions were clear – to target and wrongfully ticket those who were protesting their budget. The tickets issued have nothing to do with protecting the public and everything to do with political speech.

The police clearly illustrated how they are over resourced by having five officers act as predators. The five officers entered my safe personal space and ignored physical distancing guidelines to intimidate and exploit me. This was a clear abuse of their power and surveillance. The police should not be allowed to ignore particular rules that they are aggressively enforcing, and it does not require five officers to issue a by-law ticket to an observer. Every picture and video displays people wearing masks, reasonably distanced, and outside at a peaceful protest where we have the right to freedom of speech – a right that was taken away from us. Videos have circulated of me receiving a ticket. It is evident I am nowhere near other demonstrators and you clearly witness five officers not maintaining two metres of distance from me.

The reason I am writing this letter is to have my ticket voided as I was not in violation of the municipal by-law I was ticketed for and to receive an apology from the by-law and police officers who inappropriately exerted their power through intimidation tactics. Also, I am expressing my extreme disappointment in the Hamilton Police Service and the City of Hamilton for allowing this to happen and being the voice for many other people who were wrongfully ticketed and exploited for deeply valuing the lives of people experiencing homelessness.

I am an essential worker and I have been tirelessly working throughout the pandemic. I am a strong advocate for people experiencing homelessness and living in poverty, for people who use drugs, and all vulnerable populations in the City of Hamilton. I follow public health guidelines – I go to work, I go home, I only see people in my tight knit social circle. As you can imagine, it was quite off-putting to be terrorized by by-law and police officers when I did not disregard public health guidelines or the municipal physical distancing by-law. In addition, it is disheartening to hear that Mayor Eisenberger is refusing to meet with the organizers of the Defund the Police Protest to collectively discuss and develop solutions to the housing crisis. However, I am greatly appreciative for the support of Councilor Nann and Councilor Wilson. A special thanks to Councilor Nann for calling on the City, Province, and the Federal Government to deliver housing now.

There were over 100 residents in the largest encampment on Ferguson St. this year. There are not enough shelter beds and hotel spaces to accommodate everyone, especially those with

persistent mental health and complex needs. We need fewer shelter beds and more permanent supportive housing. We should be having conversations about building affordable housing units, not about building more shelters. People experiencing homelessness cannot self-isolate in congregated settings, wash their hands, and follow other public health guidelines. People are going to die on the streets this winter and people with the ability to invest in housing will be responsible.

During the pandemic, as a frontline worker in shelters, drop-in spaces, and withdrawal management programs, I have seen an increase in the need for mental health supports and treatment for substance use disorders. The waitlists are growing rapidly, and people are not getting the help and support they need and deserve. We need more funding for social services to support individuals with mental health and substance use disorders.

These complex social problems are only going to continue to increase during the pandemic. People have lost their income, housing, and many resources have closed or limited their hours. We are being forced to live in isolation, but as human beings we crave social connection and interaction. Simply being isolated will have a detrimental impact on people's mental health and the need for mental health and addiction supports will continue to rise. How we frame and seek to solve these social issues is critical. The worldwide crisis is a catalyst for meaningful change and policy development in our community. Therefore, I am strongly encouraging the City of Hamilton to invest in housing, mental health supports, and addiction services. The protest needs to end with the Mayor, City Council, and every level of government to do what is necessary to end the housing crisis and improve access to social services.

Thank you,

Olivia Mancini