

Good morning Mr. Chair and members of the Audit, Finance and Administration Committee, thank you for taking the time to hear from me today.

My name is James Kemp and while I am a member of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities, there wasn't time to put in a delegation request and I am speaking to you today as a private citizen.

I have come before you in order to raise a number of concerns regarding PW21055 and try to address some misconceptions and assumptions made in this report. As I have only just received a paper copy of the Dillon report yesterday, I will have to rely on more broad concepts than individual facts as I haven't had enough time to parse all one hundred and thirty pages.

To begin, the premise of the audit itself is flawed. Instead of asking the broader question: Why is DARTS chronically underfunded? Or: How can we make DARTS better given the increased disability/senior population? The audit asked to review eligibility as the singular cause of spiraling costs. It should come as no surprise that the answer was to remove people from the service to cut costs. How could it have said anything else?

Hamilton has a higher population of disabled and seniors than any other city. DARTS should be recognized as the gold standard of paratransit services. Its transports more people, over a wider range, providing more services, for less than any other city; pandemic aside.

This report makes a lot of rosy predictions of saving money due to down shifting paratransit users onto conventional transit. There are many flaws in this line of reasoning, but first and foremost, it is based on an eligibility review performed by LifeMark Physiotherapy. Physiotherapists are not qualified to make eligibility reviews. There are many reasons to need paratransit and physical disability only makes up a fraction of them. Furthermore, physiotherapists are abled by training; they believe that physical impairments can be fixed simply by more exercise. A multidisciplinary review panel of three or four medical professionals would be more fair and able to make more accurate assessments. If a reassessment was done in this fashion, I believe this committee would see far fewer gains. I am also confused on the logic of spending hundreds of thousands annually to institute this new process without any real evidence that it will save money.

This report suggests formalizing and standardizing the eligibility process. The problem with that is disability is not one size fits all. It affects us all individually and an individualized assessment process is crucial to ensure equity and inclusion for as many citizens as possible.

While I understand the need for a late cancellation/no show points system it will be discriminatory unless language is built in to assess on a case by case basis. Some disabilities are unpredictable by their very nature and you cannot penalize people for them.

This report states that conventional transit services are 100% accessible and that sufficient infrastructure is already in place. Buses may be considered accessible, but they are not capable of handling a large influx of wheelchairs, scooters and walkers. They are also not able to transport a large number of non-standard sized mobility vehicles. The driver cannot operate the rear ramp from the driver's console. There is only two wheelchair spaces and there should be four to allow for higher volume; this report does not state how often mobility devices are left behind due to lack of space, especially on busy routes during peak periods. Bus drivers have a bare minimum of accessibility training. They don't know how to properly fasten different types of devices, to say nothing of how to assist passengers with mental, social or developmental disabilities. Bus stops are not all accessible, often times, mobility devices have to embark or disembark from/onto grass or mud puddles, or just squeeze past a fence. Bus shelters are not yet all accessible either; the older styles will not allow wheelchairs and people to occupy the same space. During the winter, our access to bus stops is often blocked due to inconsistent snow removal policies. Conventional transit users are another major hurdle to people with disabilities and this report doesn't mention that either; They are resistant to giving up space to those in need and are impatient with the extra loading/unloading time, especially on express routes.

I suffer from an invisible disability, a connective tissue disorder that, among other things, causes my joints to dislocate and subluxate with very little effort. Conventional transit is extremely debilitating and painful for various reasons. I would often leave the bus in far worse shape than when I boarded. Between 2007 and 2012, I applied for DARTS transit four times. Due to my rare condition and unusual symptoms, I was denied for paratransit services every time, I was issued Taxi Scrips though and they

have served as a lifeline ever since. They are how I get groceries home to my family. As this report suggests, I have never been reassessed since then for fear of losing what little I have. This audit wants to make it more difficult to get approval. How many more desperate people will be turned away? Ironically, if I were to be reassessed now, I would most likely be approved for full paratransit because my condition has worsened enough to require a wheelchair and assistance. How many people could be helped if Taxi Scrip eligibility was severed from DARTS eligibility and offered as a stop gap to those that get denied for paratransit, but still need some sort of travel assistance due to their disability? That wasn't a question in the scope of this audit though.

This audit reminds me of the old parable about the six blind men and the elephant. Each one felt something different and declared what they had found was something else; the tail, a rope; the leg, a tree trunk; the body, a wall; the ear, a leaf; the tusk, a spear; the trunk, a snake. The audit has found the leg and declared it a tree trunk, "now hand me that axe and we'll get this problem solved." We need to take a step back and look at this problem more broadly before we start making wholesale change. Otherwise, we run the risk of causing needless harm. You cannot save money on the backs of the disabled.

While I cannot officially speak for anyone else, I am sure that many people would be happy to try and identify issues or inefficiencies that need improvement and devise creative solutions to address them, you need only ask.

I wish to thank this committee for its time and attention.