

January 9, 2021

Dear Councillor Wilson and Members of Hamilton City Council:

We are writing to you with regards to the assault and charges laid against young housing advocates by Hamilton Police Services in late November 2021. As residents of Ward 1 we feel a sense of collective responsibility to speak out in support of those who are on the front lines of ensuring our city's most vulnerable residents are safe and secure.

As you are aware, on November 24th, officers began evicting individuals who were staying at J.C. Beemer Park after a fire occurred. Demonstrators aligned with the Hamilton Encampment Support Network (HESN) were present and aimed to advocate for houseless individuals who lost their shelter and belongings in the fire. Demonstrators were met by police officers and two of them were arrested for obstructing police and assaulting an officer. In the following days, others were arrested due to their involvement in related advocacy activities.

A total of six individuals were arrested, five of whom were Black youth. During these arrests, police officers threatened to use their tasers and guns on these individuals. Additionally, they engaged in violent behaviour beyond the use of "reasonable force" including: placing their knee on the neck of a disabled Muslim woman, dragging individuals by their arms across pavement, choking and punching, as well as failing to provide necessary medication to detained advocates.

We recognize that this event occurred a few months ago, but we have seen no discernible changes within the HPS to suggest that the conditions that created this situation have been remedied. We believe it is important that even after the news cycle moves on, that citizens hold our public institutions accountable continuously.

We are writing this letter in solidarity with and support of the calls to action of Black Community Leaders at a press conference on December 1st, as well as HESN members' call on January 5th for policy solutions to be created by the City for sustainable housing. Representatives from organizations that include Hamilton Anti-Racism Resource Centre and the Afro Canadian Caribbean Association are calling for the charges against arrested individuals to be dropped. They are also calling for a judicial inquiry to be launched into this incident as well as encampment evictions to be stopped. Key Hamilton institutions including McMaster University's Office of Community Engagement and the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic have demonstrated public support for these calls.

We similarly felt it crucial to voice support for these calls, as well as our utmost concern regarding the actions of the Hamilton Police Services against young, racialized houselessness advocates. As our Ward Representative, we appreciate that Councillor Wilson has spoken out against these incidents and in support of the work being done by HESN. We urge all of City Council to address the calls for action made by Black Community leaders in short order.

Thank you,

Concerned Citizens of Ward 1