



Hamilton Community Legal Clinic
Clinique juridique communautaire de Hamilton

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1/2

February 4th, 2025

Dear Hamilton City Councillors and Mayor:

RE: February 7th , 2025 GIC (Budget meeting) & Hamilton Community Legal Clinic Partnership with the City of Hamilton

I am writing on behalf of our organization to express our concerns regarding two motions scheduled for a vote on February 7, 2025, at the General Issues Committee (Budget) meeting.

The specific motions I am referring to are as follows:

1. **Re-Alignment of Taxpayer Funding to Good Faith Encampment Support Organizations**
2. **Taxpayer Funding Exclusion for Organizations Involved in Litigation Against the City of Hamilton** : That all third-party organizations, groups and individuals engaged in litigation against the City of Hamilton within the last five years (2019 to 2024) are excluded from all City funding in the 2025 budget, including grants, loans, donations, in-kind contributions, direct funding or any other sources of funding from the City of Hamilton.

The City of Hamilton's Tenant Support Program is at risk if these motions were to pass. The Tenant Support Program is a partnership between the City of Hamilton, the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, ACORN, and the Housing Help Centre. This program came in effect after a unanimous vote of the Council in June 2024. The goal of this program has been to assist protecting tenants from bad-faith evictions. This is part of the City's goal to maintain a stock of affordable housing and keep people housed, preventing an increase in homelessness.

The Hamilton Community Legal Clinic's role in this agreement is to provide legal advice and representation to tenants and provide legal education to tenants across the City. In its original agreement with the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic, the City of Hamilton identified that it expected that the Clinic would support 200 tenants per year. The program has been in place for approximately 6 months and has provided legal advice, representation, and support to 236 tenants.

If the intent of these motions are to remove funding from the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic because we were carrying out our mandate and that one of case involved litigation against the City of Hamilton regarding the encampment eviction case this is a concerning reaction. The motions are set to harm the Tenant Support Program which is entirely separate from the encampment litigation. None of the City of Hamilton's funding is being used for the encampment litigation.

The Hamilton Community Legal Clinic has always been pleased to work with the City of Hamilton, and this program allowed us to provide additional support to tenants in areas of law that we have not previously had the financial capacity to offer. This program provides more services to vulnerable tenants and keeps more people housed.



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The Hamilton Community Legal Clinic cannot abandon its core mandate by denying legal support to tenants who wish to challenge government actions. It is a fundamental aspect of our constitution and our democracy that people can challenge and test government action to ensure that governments comply with the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

While currently aimed at the legal clinic, these motions will have far-reaching consequences that could silence organizations, groups, and individuals, instilling fear and discouraging dissent. This approach jeopardizes community engagement and limits access to justice, ultimately weakening the foundation of collaboration and advocacy that the City of Hamilton and our community relies on.

The Hamilton Community Legal Clinic has served low-income citizens in the areas of housing, injured workers, social assistance, employment and immigration for decades. We have also served our community through public legal education, and community development. We support other community organization in their efforts to keep tenants housed throughout the city. We will continue to do that work even if the City of Hamilton chooses to end this partnership. The impact on the Hamilton Community Legal Clinic will be minimal. The effect on the community of low-income tenants whose housing is threatened will be significant. More tenants will lose their housing and will become homeless.

We urge the Mayor and Councillors to oppose these two motions. It is crucial to allow the Tenant Support Program to continue. Additionally, we must avoid creating a culture of fear and reprisal that would deter community organizations, groups, and individuals from expressing their concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clare Freeman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Clare Freeman, BA, MSW, RSW
Executive Director