

RE: Report Item 8.2 and Motions 9.1 and 9.2 on the Hamilton City Council Meeting of 5 March 2025

Dear Mayor Horwath and City Councillors,

In this City Council meeting, there is a report and two motions before you which raise grave concern, not just for disabled unhoused people within Hamilton, but in terms of the precedent being set for our communities across Ontario. Abandoning human rights-based approaches to working through these issues and failing to ensure the safety and well-being of our unhoused neighbours is at the core of these proposals and, instead, reflects a reactionary desire for punishment and retribution. This is the image of Hamilton you are projecting to the wider world: one where disabled people—even though we make up more of your city than anywhere else in Ontario—are unwelcome if unhoused.

We have delegated many times about the impact of a lack of strong social assistance, accessible housing, and many other areas of the parts of our system that support disabled Hamiltonians. While we will have a Provincial Government that has previously shown that it does not care about the wellbeing of disabled people, we know that you have the power to press your Provincial and Federal peers for the investments needed for our communities. Yet, both this report and current motions distract from the need to work together to achieve this.

Staff Report on Encampment Response

At the heart of this report is a proposed, total shift in the response from the City of Hamilton away from a human rights based approach towards one based on punishment and exclusion. Others will dispute this assertion and argue that you have done enough with past efforts to create emergency shelter. But, we all know that shelters are not permanent housing—our unhoused and periodically housed neighbours will remain precarious in a time of wider societal uncertainty.

Instead of looking towards long-term solutions—to build a Hamilton where neither shelters nor encampments are necessary—investments are being made in police and enforcement. 335,223 dollars which could be otherwise directed to continue a human rights based approach will instead be used to further surveil and criminalize our unhoused neighbours. This approach will result in only further disablement and pain for our unhoused neighbours and gain nothing for other Hamilton residents.

In our view, if these recommendations are followed through, the only thing accomplished will be a settling of grievances for those in Hamilton who wished for these measures to never have begun and to have always denied our unhoused neighbours their human rights. We cannot rely on the police baton to solve difficult problems and to ensure the rights of everyone—this approach will fail and will result in more issues for the city down the line. Instead, reconsider these actions and uphold your wider obligations.

Re-Alignment of Taxpayer Funding to Good Faith Encampment Support Organizations

Similarly, we urge you to allocate more resources to housing or to support our unhoused neighbours in other ways, instead of spending more time to engage in rehashing related grievances against community organizers and unhoused Hamiltonians. As we have said

many times before: A better way forward would be to expand support while actually investing time in pressuring the Provincial and Federal governments to take up their responsibilities to construct accessible, affordable housing in Hamilton.

Community organizations are not the enemy, rather we should be more concerned about coming together to make sure all Hamilton residents get what they need. We and many in this community are open partners to this work, in *actual* good faith, but this Council must also act with transparency and clarity in this work to join *us* as we do the work to hold other levels of government accountable.

Taxpayer Funding Exclusion for Organizations Involved in Litigation Against the City of Hamilton

While this did not get debated previously, we are saddened to see such a transparent and bold-faced attack on poverty law services in Hamilton return for consideration. This particular motion is a deeply concerning position against fundamental access to justice for all people in this city. Community Legal Clinics are some of the few spaces in Ontario that allow working class people a chance at accountability in areas of poverty law. Seeking to exclude such a space from funding when it is simply serving its function in our community attacks the right of all working people to justice. To claim that “many residents have lost confidence in the Community Legal Clinic as a service provider receiving taxpayer dollars” makes us wonder: which residents do you mean? Is it only those who earn enough money to pay a private bar lawyer that deserve a shot at justice? Impugning the character of lawyers, paralegals, and others who seek to serve their community is beneath the dignity of any City Council and punches down on all marginalized Hamiltonians.

Transferring funds that operate the Tenant Support Program in this context is fundamentally concerning. The passage of this motion would send a chilling message to all service providers in Hamilton: Don't serve the city's precariously housed, marginalized residents and ensure they have access to justice—challenging authority means future retribution. These services are critical for supporting access to justice against bad faith evictions—keeping this service connected to residents' legal supports and expertise simply makes sense. This motion only undermines support structures and can only worsen the housing situation in Hamilton.

With all this said, I urge you all to reject this report's recommendations and both of these motions. Councillors, refocus your attention on what will make the most positive impact on all Hamilton residents: reinvestment in our social systems now when we need it most. Now is the time to end the politics of austerity, put aside the police baton, and stop undercutting these critical services for all Hamiltonians.

Now is the time to come together and build a better Hamilton, together.

Regards,



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