

TOPIC: THE HOMELESS IN TORONTO

SAMPLE LETTER TO POLITICIANS

To: <mayor_tory@toronto.ca>, <councillor_bailao@toronto.ca>, <councillor_carroll@toronto.ca>, <steve.clark@pc.ola.org>, <adam.vaughan@parl.gc.ca>, <Han.Dong@parl.gc.ca>

According to Fred Victor, a charitable organization that has been in operation for more than 124 years, there are over **9,200 homeless in Toronto**. People become homeless for a variety of reasons, some of which are loss of employment, poverty, family break-up or violence, mental illness, substance use, alcoholism, physical or sexual abuse, to name a few. Our grossly overcrowded and understaffed shelters are a blatant sign that we, as a society, do not value everyone equally. Shamefully, it is only recently, when the pandemic has introduced the possibility of the homeless spreading the virus among themselves and the rest of us, that all levels of Government finally seem to have awakened to these ongoing issues. It should now be painfully obvious that we need to provide conditions that enable all people to be contributors to society.

As a result of Covid19, many of the homeless have been housed temporarily in hotels that are not currently in use; for most, this may be the first time in years that they have a bed and a bathroom, and a sense of dignity. It would be inhumane to simply force any person back out onto the street, once the pandemic waves have passed. Re-eviction would be like an affirmation to the homeless that they are not, nor have ever been, valued members of society. Our city now has an opportunity to end homelessness by buying up vacant hotels and supporting homeless people there, as a stepping stone back into their own proper housing. Vacant hotels are probably more readily available than the modular homes the City has just started to build, though clearly modular homes would be a better long term solution. The focus needs to be on supporting people in their search for a more permanent affordable home. Marginalized people will be able to pay for their housing, once they are given enough respect to have a job or a livable income.

We need only follow the lead of the Fred Victor organization for examples of the benefits of converting shelters to hotels, and building supportive housing, as well as offering employment & training services. As recognized in countries like Finland, **housing for every person should be a basic human right**.

A program of buying up faltering hotel space, and rapidly building thousands of modular homes, requires support from multiple levels of government. Once we have taken steps to ensure that every person is given a livable income, thus enabling them to rent a decent space, the City can sell these places. The new federal CERB is a small step in the direction of a livable income, but needs to be institutionalized, and brought to a level that can result in a decent standard of living for all. We need to value and respect the basic rights of every human being, in order to maintain a healthy and thriving society.

Sincerely,

[Your name and address]