

PUBLIC STATEMENT AGAINST ENCAMPMENT EVICTIONS FROM TORONTO YOGA AND MOVEMENT BUSINESS OWNERS

November 30, 2020

TO:

Mayor John Tory

City councillors Ana Bailao, Brad Bradford, Joe Cressy, Paula Fletcher, Mike Layton, Josh Matlow, and Kristyn Wong-Tam

Mary-Anne Bedard, General Manager of Shelter, Support & Housing Administration

Janie Romoff, General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation Department

FROM: Toronto Yoga and Movement Business Owners

We are a group of Toronto based Yoga and Movement Studio Business Owners. Collectively, we are concerned for the well-being of all people living in Toronto encampments.

We are writing to demand that the city stop spending taxpayers' money on clearing encampments. Instead, encampment residents should be provided with fire safety and survival gear. Furthermore, we ask that you impose a moratorium on encampment clearings, and move to repeal the by-laws that make it illegal to camp.

Encampments are the result of a decades-long housing crisis caused by public policy that encouraged the financialization of housing while cutting investments in affordable housing and Rent-Geared-to-Income options in the downtown core. We are calling on city council to invest in 10,000 units of RGI permanent housing options in the next three years and to **impose a moratorium on encampment evictions**. We are calling on the city to make a public statement that they will not clear encampments.

This is a public health issue. The CDC still recommends that encampments not be cleared: "Unless individual housing units are available, do not clear encampments during community spread of COVID-19. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread."

The City's winter plan falls short on providing enough space for people. Their plan provides space for 560 people but advocates and outreach workers estimate that there are over 1000 people sleeping on the streets and with the current 'eviction blitz' that number is going to grow. The shelter system is full. People calling central intake every night are not able to get beds. See this [CBC report: City has far fewer homeless shelter beds than it claims it has, street pastor says](#). Because of this, people will be sleeping outside regardless of whether or not encampments are cleared, but without the communities they've created over the past many months.

The City must provide encampment residents with basic survival gear and access to sanitation. The City should follow the recommendations of the Faulkner inquest and provide survival gear, including fire safety, to people in encampments. While city councillors voted in

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favour of giving out survival gear on October 28, 2020, we have yet to see city workers do this on the ground. Up until now city staff and police have confiscated people's heat sources and destroyed people's tents. The city should also open up recreation centres and public washrooms 24/7 for encampment residents to use this winter.

In light of the pandemic, people living in encampments need our support now more than ever. **Most importantly, the city must stop criminalizing people living in encampments, and it must begin to treat them and their property with respect.**

We recently learned that the General Manager of Parks issued a letter to Khaleel Selvwright, the man building tiny shelters for people living outside this winter, threatening to charge him for the cost of their disposal. People who are finding pragmatic solutions for people's survival in the absence of permanent housing options from the city, like Khaleel, should be applauded, not reprimanded.

Sincerely,

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