



December 7, 2020

**Economic and Community Development Committee**

**EC18.3 – Supporting People with Disabilities in Toronto During and Beyond COVID-19 - Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Programs**

Dear Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee

We are writing on behalf of the Right to Housing in Toronto (R2HTO), a coalition of organizations and individuals working to support the implementation of the human right to housing by the City of Toronto. The right to housing includes the principle of accessibility - people of all abilities must have housing that accommodates their needs.

Across the City, the current experience of those with disabilities in securing adequate housing remains unacceptable. Accessible housing is simply not available to those who need it most: people are waiting 10-14 years for rent-g geared-to-income housing; 5-7 years for supportive housing; and even longer for units accessible to people with disabilities. In terms of accessible housing that is available, people with disabilities continue to experience widespread discrimination when attempting to access and maintain this housing. This widespread discrimination inevitably makes persons with disabilities more vulnerable to evictions, homelessness, and inadequate housing conditions.

In addition to the above, we know that homelessness disproportionately affects persons with disabilities. In a vicious circle, disability often leads to homelessness and homelessness, in turn, creates or exacerbates impairments and additional barriers linked to stigma and isolation. In Toronto, our shelter systems in the City of Toronto are disproportionately over-represented by marginalized groups, including those with disabilities. Some shelters have accessibility features for persons with physical disabilities and very few are accessible for persons with other types of disabilities.

With the above in mind, R2HTO is encouraged to see the City has committed to prioritize accessibility for all new shelter and housing in development. We are also encouraged by the City's stated commitments to engage with people with lived experience of disability on all future efforts to increase the amount of accessible housing and to ensure residents of shelters are provided with the appropriate level of accessibility support. The specific commitments to consultation and inclusion within today's presentation are good first steps. However, a rights-based approach to housing policy requires more than just consultation. We are writing today to urge the City to take meaningful steps to ensure any engagement efforts with persons with disabilities aligns with key principles of the right to adequate housing.

A rights-based approach to ensuring accessible and adequate housing requires the full participation and leadership of persons with disabilities and communities directly affected by a lack of accessible housing and inaccessible shelters. Full participation must continue well past the design and implementation phase of accessible housing policies into ongoing efforts to monitor and evaluate this policy. Indeed, persons with disabilities, and those who advocate with them, must be given widespread opportunities for input into all stages of the decision-making process. These opportunities must be ongoing and not episodic. Necessary support must be provided to organizations of persons with disabilities to facilitate these opportunities.

Prioritizing meaningful engagement, participation and leadership from persons with disabilities is about more than ensuring accessible housing is physically, equitably and financially available for persons with disabilities – these steps are necessary for ensuring persons with disabilities can effectively participate in the life of the community where they live. R2HTO is hopeful that committing to and expanding on the engagement opportunities highlighted during today's presentation will help begin to address the stigmatization and discrimination persons with disabilities continue to face when seeking housing and securing the resources necessary for maintaining accessible housing.

Thank you,

On Behalf of the Right to Housing in Toronto