



January 26, 2021

Budget Committee BU26.1 - Public Presentations on the 2021 Capital and Operating Budgets

Dear Members of the Budget 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 adequate housing by the City of Toronto.

The City's progress on their commitment to the progressive realization of the right to housing continues to move in the right direction and this progress could not come at a more crucial time. Emergency housing issues such as encampments, access to adequate housing, the prospect of mass eviction into homelessness, and access to shelters have reached critical status. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the impacts of housing insecurity, especially for Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour in Toronto and has demonstrated that the inclusive and equitable human right to adequate housing is of great importance to the lives and wellbeing of all citizens of Toronto.

We are writing today to urge City Council to commit to establishing and fully resourcing an Office of the Housing Commissioner through the current budget cycle. The stated priorities for this year's budget cycle include managing the impact of COVID-19 and ensuring recovery in addition to building a prosperous Toronto with a focus on equity. These priorities cannot be accomplished without prioritizing inclusive, equitable and adequate housing. Moving forward, the establishment and full resourcing of an Office of the Housing Commissioner would ensure accountability, transparency, and action towards finding effective equitable human rights-based solutions to the above priorities. This office will play a key role in monitoring the City's progress on the HousingTO 2020-30 targets and timelines, receiving information and submissions from human rights-holders and advocates, identifying, and reviewing systemic violations of the human right to housing and making recommendations to Council on necessary measures to meet the

City's human rights obligations. This Office would also ensure the City is better positioned to address the negative impacts of future pandemics and health crises. We believe that the immediate establishment of a Housing Commissioner is an urgent matter and must be prioritized by the City during the upcoming budget cycle.

The Office of the Housing Commissioner will act as a key accountability mechanism of the City's human rights-based approach to housing policy; a necessary and crucial mechanism for dealing with long-term and emergency housing and homelessness issues that have arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An Office of the Housing Commissioner can ensure that correct measures are in place, inclusive, equity-based targets are met, and will be able to provide proactive recommendations to guide sustainable and effective housing policy. Crucially, the Office of the Housing Commissioner will also be positioned to provide human rights-based guidance during times of crisis. This guidance is critical for ensuring efforts like transitioning shelter residents into permanent housing, addressing the housing inequities of Black renter households as documented by the [Wellesley Institute](#), and/or addressing the looming evictions crisis align with the City's commitment to a rights-based approach to housing policy.

We envision the Housing Commissioner's role to include the power to monitor, claim, and enforce the inclusive and equitable human right to adequate housing across Toronto with the ability to recommend corrective actions to systemic barriers. Creating and adequately resourcing an Office of the Housing Commissioner will allow the city to approach systemic and ongoing housing problems from a proactive, equity-based position and with a focus on addressing housing inequity and inadequacy among residents and communities who have been marginalized by systems of poverty and housing insecurity. We urge members of this Committee to reflect on how much better positioned the City would have been to address systemic issues made worse by COVID-19 if a commissioner's office had been in place throughout the pandemic.

We understand the City is facing unique and unprecedented challenges relating to their budget and, because of this, we echo the City's continued calls for increased support from the provincial and federal governments to assist with the housing and homelessness challenges facing the City. Establishing a fully resourced Office of the Housing Commissioner is critical to helping navigate through these challenges. We urge this Committee and members of City Council to establish and adequately resource this Office without further delay.

Thank you, on behalf of the Right to Housing in Toronto