

August 14, 2023

Strategic Priorities and Policy Committee  
300 Dufferin Avenue  
London, ON N6B 1Z2  
Sent via email: [SPPC@london.ca](mailto:SPPC@london.ca)

Dear Honourable Mayor J. Morgan and Members of the Committee

LIFE\*SPIN is a registered charity that has led programming in London for more than 30 years, as well as one of the longest established Community Economic Development (CED) organizations serving low-income citizens in Ontario.

We have several concerns about a motion that may be tabled at your next meeting, by the Deputy Mayor. Primarily, the draft motion, published on Facebook, has an insufficient evidentiary basis given the limitations of data collection in low income communities. We are further concerned about the ongoing stigmatization of vulnerable and marginalized communities, and that any legislation resulting from this advocacy would both distract from other efforts and struggle to meet ethical, constitutional, and UNDRIP obligations.

We have expressed for quite some time, including through submissions to Council, our reservations about the limitations of data collection of the homeless population using shelter/outreach services and those who do not. Homelessness and poverty are complex systems, and current collection models cannot account for many of these factors. In London, based on our expertise in the field, we estimate an underreporting of women with children (particularly single parent families), new immigrant families, and Indigenous families living off reserve in the city. Across Canada, experts have expressed concern that the true scale of homelessness is being underreported by a ratio of 3:1 and that statistical modeling struggles to account for this phenomenon of "hidden homelessness." Given the existing dataset (or lack thereof) it is not reasonable to conclude that an increase in visible homelessness is caused by or even related to the transient migration of low income people. There is even less evidence to substantiate or define what is meant by relocation "against their will." Without comprehensive data leading the discussion, we are gravely concerned that there is an insufficient evidentiary basis to move forward with this type of motion. The motion in question calls for punitive measures against charitable and non-for-profit organizations and proposes highly unorthodox suspensions of professional accreditations, without an accompanying staff report analyzing the legal implications or an indication of which organizations or individuals might be impacted. Legislation to this effect would penalize service providers doing their best to serve clients in a dramatically under-resourced social service sector and would distract (and even undermine) the important provincial advocacy being done on the Whole of Community System Response.

We also continue to be concerned about the use of dehumanizing and stigmatizing rhetoric in discussions of low income communities in London. We have recently witnessed an attack on shelter staff who were attacked with a variety of weapons including a machete, baseball bat, and taser by neighbouring residents, in addition to other acts of violence, not reported in headline news, towards unhoused individuals and the frontline workers that serve them. As the leaders in our community, London City Council sets the tone for the discussion of vulnerable and marginalized populations. In our opinion, this motion should not move forward without any staff analysis on London's obligations under the Canadian Constitution, which guarantees freedom of movement for all Canadians or under the UNDRIP, which protects the free movement of Indigenous peoples, who are estimated to make up at least 30% of London's homeless population. The suggestion that our homeless problem is being driven by other communities deflects our responsibility, feeds the stigma, and does nothing to address the issue.

London is a healthcare hub in Southwestern Ontario, which attracts many low income individuals who are seeking support for a variety of ailments. The lack of affordable and attainable housing upon their arrival is not the fault of these community members or the social services that may have been servicing them prior to their arrival.

We would encourage Councillors to vote against this motion and to instead prioritize provincial advocacy efforts on the Whole of Community System Response, along with policies that promote housing stability for low income Londoners, such as rent control, ending vacancy decontrol, and government development of affordable housing stock.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely

*Frances Elizabeth Moore*

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*Jacqueline Thompson*

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